the PARIS REVIEW

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FRANK O'CONNOR
and
ANGUS WILSON
two interviews

MARIO AVATI
and
ROBERT WHITE
two portfolios

W.S. MERWIN

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SHORT STORIES

POETRY

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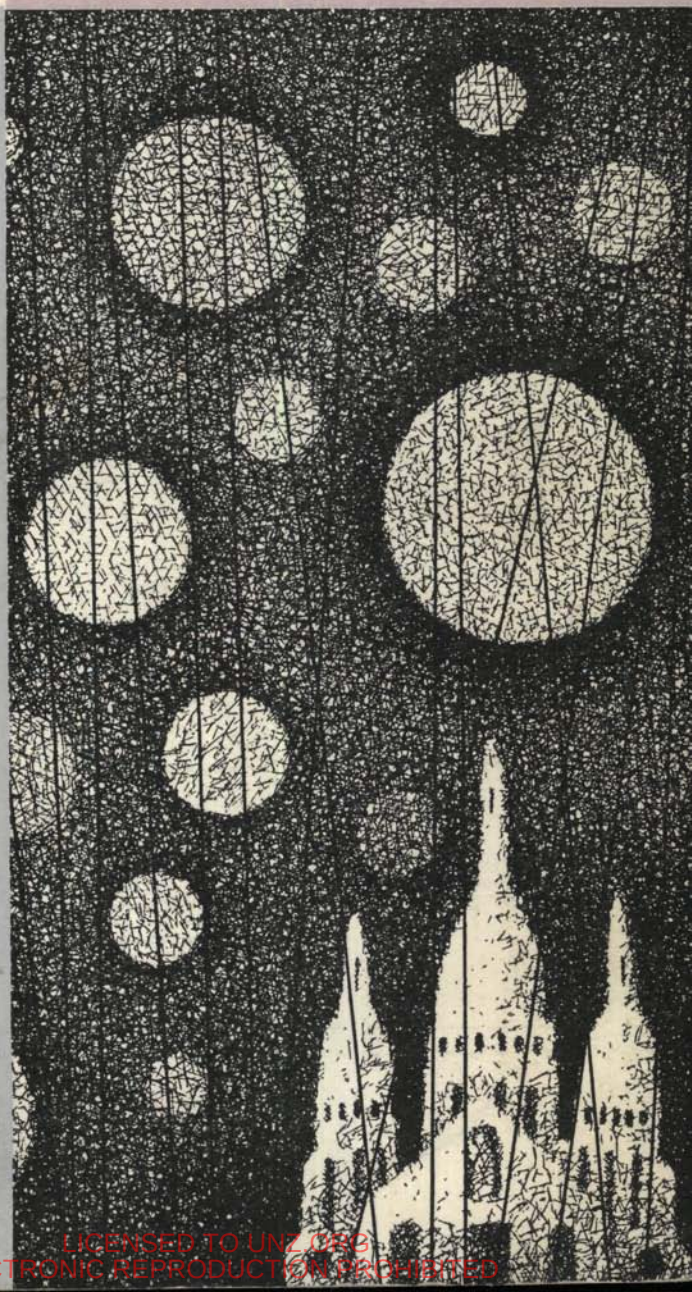

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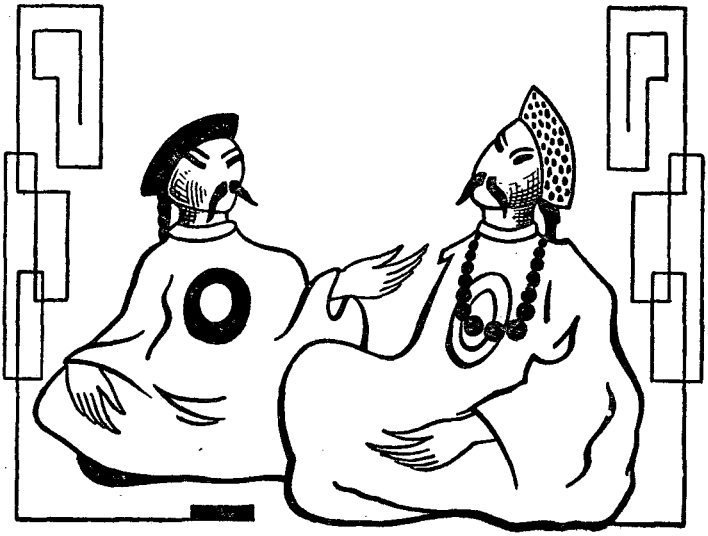

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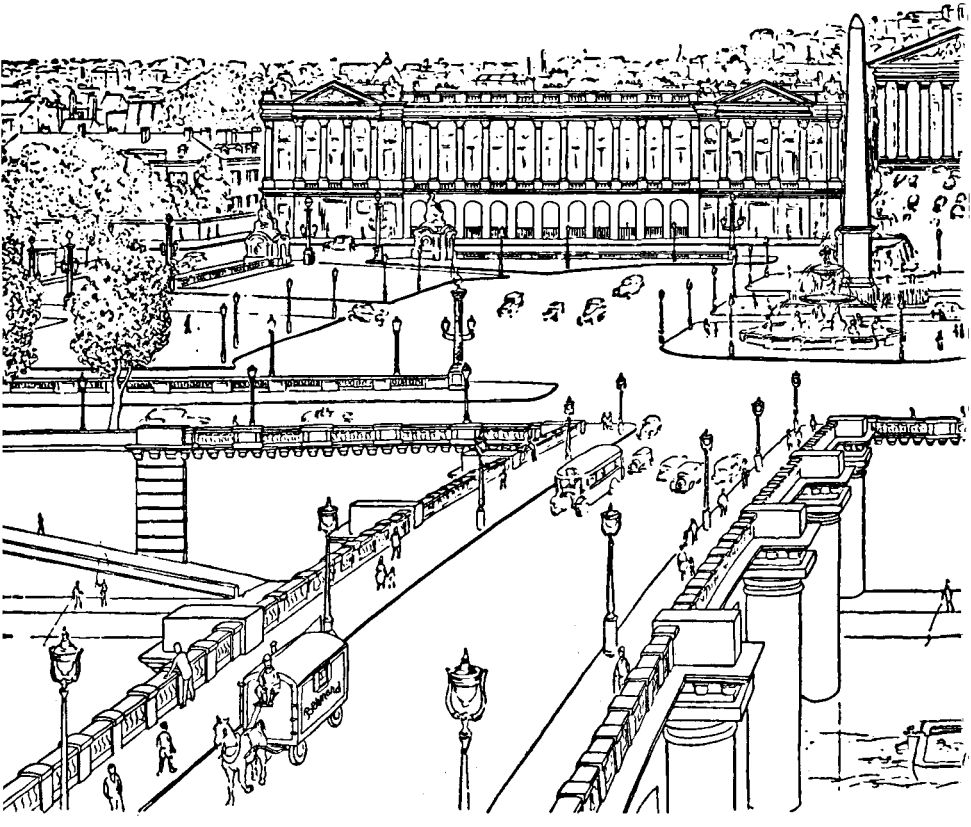

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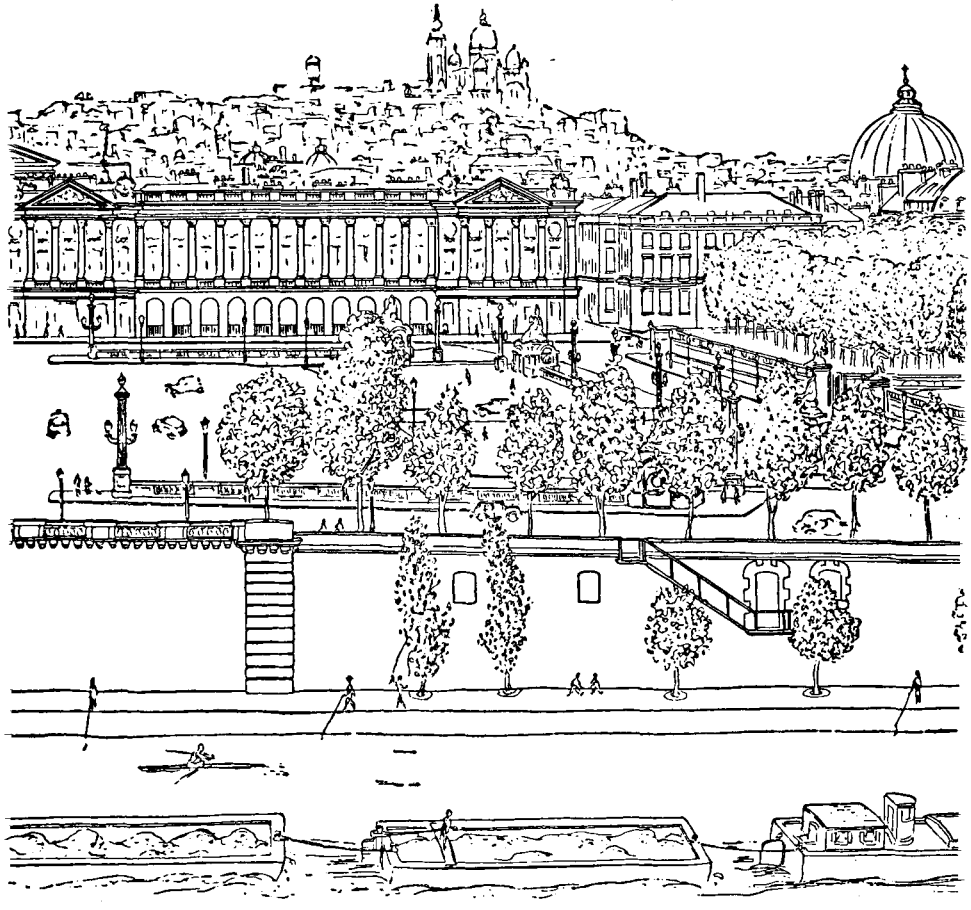

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(Cover and contents page by Mario Avati, Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois)

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JOHN SHEPLEY

Laughing with Grandmother

EVERY day, in the intense Arizona sunlight, the cars streamed by along the highway, crossing the desert towards California, and the old lady sat in a rocking-chair on the cement porch of the tourist cabin and counted them. She was a fragile and shrunken old lady, her face soft, blurred, yellowish-white like old putty, with delicate traceries of blue veins embedded in her temples; she wore a nightgown and a flannel bathrobe, canvas slippers, and a wide-brimmed straw hat from under which hung loose wisps of white hair; her gaze, though intent on the passing automobiles, was mild and innocent of meaning, and as she counted, she chuckled and giggled to herself. "Two hundred and seventeen... two hundred and eighteen... two hundred and nineteen... two hundred and... two hundred and... oh, I've lost count again," she announced with a bemused smile, appealing to the little boy beside her.

"Two hundred and twenty-five, now," said Dick. He sat on the cement stoop, his elbows on his knees, his chin cupped in his hands, staring so directly into the sweltering highway that his eyes smarted. He wore levis and a fringed buckskin jacket, a cowboy hat, boots, and had a pistol strapped to his side. He was nine years old and he didn't much care for this game.

Sometimes they varied it. "The twentieth one that goes by *belongs* to me!" the old lady would proclaim—patiently they counted. She was delighted when the twentieth car turned out to be a shiny new one; ecstatically she clapped her hands—"There it goes, there it goes—didn't you see it?—that's *my* car!"—as it whizzed away into the infinite desert. But when,

–Drawing by Harry Steiner

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as also sometimes happened, it turned out to be a dusty old wreck of a Model-T Ford, with a bed and a chickencoop tied on top, she pouted sorrowfully—"No, that isn't my car—I didn't say the twentieth anyway, maybe I said the twenty-fifth. It was *you* said the twentieth—it's *your* car!"

"You *did* say the twentieth, you did, you did, you *did*—" Dick whispered angrily to himself. But they went on with the game.

She had two daughters, this old lady. One of them had beautiful eyes, dark, rather sad, around which crow's feet were beginning to gather, and luxuriant auburn hair which she wore in a loose knot at the nape of her neck. She had been married twice and divorced twice, and she was Dick's mother. The other had pale eyes with sandy-colored lashes, and scanty yellowish hair which she pinned tightly against her scalp. She was older than Dick's mother, she had never been married, she was Dick's Aunt Agnes. Dick's mother supported the family in the stucco cabin of the tourist court—she kept a shop in town where she sold curios, Navajo jewelry of silver and turquoise, fancy Mexican leatherwork, souvenir ashtrays, Indian dolls. She was known as a shrewd businesswoman, but often in the afternoon she left her shop to the two seventeen-year-old Mexican girls whom she employed as clerks, and sat by herself in the cocktail lounge of the Grand Pioneer Hotel, chain-smoking and drinking double whiskies. She knew what it was to suffer, as she sometimes even said, and her beautiful eyes would become deep and bitter and mysterious. Aunt Agnes did all the cooking and housework, and she neither smoked nor drank nor suffered—in fact, with her lips pinched, her eyes always bland, she stated that suffering didn't exist. Nothing bad existed, illness nor evil nor death—these were but things of the mind. "Then what *does* exist, Aggie dear?" Dick's mother would say, impatiently lighting a cigarette and giving her sister an ironical little smile.

"*God* exists," Aunt Agnes would reply with dignity.

"Well, *I* believe in God, too," said Dick's mother, and her eyes were sad and truthful.

She insisted that Dick go to Sunday-school. Every Sunday

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morning, wearing a dark blue suit and starched collar and necktie, his hair parted and slicked down with brillantine, he stood at the bus-stop on the hot highway, carrying under his arm the notebook for the stamps. The stamps were on large, glossy, perforated sheets—each one was a brightly colored illustration from the life of Jesus. Each Sunday you tore off one of the stamps and glued it in its proper square in the book, then the Sunday-school teacher talked about it. And Dick's mother, just for herself, made him memorize the Twenty-third Psalm. In three days he had learned it perfectly, but when he stood before her—she was puffing a cigarette and smiling at him with love and encouragement—he felt suddenly inexplicably foolish with his cowboy boots and toy gun. "The-Lord-is-my-shepherd," he began rapidly. "I... I... shall not... want—?"

"He maketh me..." she prompted, smiling.

"He maketh me... uh... to lie down in pastures—"

"In *green* pastures, Dick darling."

"Green pastures. He... uh... leadeth me... beside... beside..." He was on the point of tears—she flung out her arms to him.

They finished it together. "—He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen."

Yes, they believed both in God and the shadow of death, although Dick couldn't bring himself to tell her that he disliked Sunday-school and was uninspired by the colored stamps—this very realization made him feel too guilty. Nevertheless every Sunday when the noon bus back out from town bore him along the highway, past rows of squalid Mexican dwellings, past garbage dumps and vacant lots, past other tourist courts—each like his own an oblong

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arrangement of identical cabins—past unused spaces of intervening desert and hedges of prickly pear, and let him off at his own tourist court—the most remote from town and Sunday-school—where he dashed into the cabin and, taking off the blue suit and collar and necktie, got back into his cowboy outfit and strapped the pistol belt around his waist, he felt free, though unable to stop thinking about God. Just how his mother saw Him, Dick wasn't sure, but he suspected that her God and his were the same, a terrible old man with flaming eyes and beard, who would sweep out of the blue mountains on the horizon and whirl across the desert like a sandstorm into his bed in the tourist cabin, to gather him up in red-hot fists and charge him with all his unforgivable sins. "Now I lay me down to sleep..." said Dick faithfully every night, and went on to pray for his mother.

Of Aunt Agnes's God, he didn't know what to think. Sometimes He was a Plane, and sometimes a Sphere, and sometimes a Level of Comprehension. What did seem clear was that He didn't have a beard, couldn't get angry, and that He encompassed All. But apparently the All that He encompassed didn't really exist, which included, Dick had to suppose, this tourist court in the desert, the asphalt highway that turned liquid in the blazing sun, the stream of cars, Dick, his mother, Aunt Agnes herself. It was rather a relief that *Grandmother* never mentioned God—she only sat on the porch and gleefully counted the automobiles.

Dick's mother and Aunt Agnes disagreed on many things, but mostly they disagreed about what to do with their mother. Dick's mother said that she was old and ill and should be put into a Home. Aunt Agnes repeated that illness didn't exist, it was a thing of the mind.

"It certainly is a thing of *her* mind!" Dick's mother retorted sharply. "For God's sake, Aggie, can't you see that she's gone completely childish and half-witted? It's *unpleasant* having her around! And besides she needs doctors, care, constant attention—until she dies. We can't give her that *here*."

"But here we can give her love," said Aunt Agnes softly. "At least some of us can. I know that you'd rather get rid of

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her, Florrie. But you've never worried about her before, so why should you start now? I'm the one who's always been left to look after Mother, always, since the beginning...." She paused, jabbing a hairpin into place. "—and I'll keep on with it, until...." She broke off entirely, for she never spoke of "death".

"You talk about love, but you'd keep her here in the condition she's in!" Dick's mother cried, her eyes flashing with fury. "Instead of sending her someplace where she could get decent medical care. That's what I call *real* cruelty!"

"Florrie dear, there's no need to discuss it. It's I who do all the cooking for her, all the cleaning-up—"

"It's *I* who make the money for this house! It's *I* who'll have to pay the hospital bills when she's committed—"

And so the two sisters, one with beautiful eyes who knew suffering, one with bland eyes for whom suffering didn't exist, went on quarreling about their mother, and every day it was Dick who conducted the old lady outside to her rocking-chair on the porch, and stayed with her there, only jumping up from time to time to bring her glasses of iced tea with lots of sugar, or the chocolate bars that she especially craved even though she couldn't chew them very well. And when—it happened three or four times an hour—she had to go to the bathroom, it was Dick who had to lead her inside to it. He would show her to the door of it and remove her bathrobe for her, averting his eyes from her bony shoulders and the little wrinkled yellowish breasts that showed under her loose nightgown, close the door behind her and wait there until she was finished. Then he would take her back to the porch, seat her carefully in the rocking-chair, straighten the tilt of her straw hat for her, and again they would begin counting cars, the swift shiny ones, the slow battered ones with chicken coops and beds, the in-between ones, but all of them going in the same direction. "Rich men, poor men, beggarmen, thieves," Dick sang to himself, "Doctors, lawyers, Indian chieves... all go to California... all except *us*!"—and he took his pistol holster and went *bang-bang-bang* at the highway.

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Dick didn't love his grandmother. He didn't even know if he liked her. But she was a duty apparently imposed on him, she was a phenomenon that frightened him a little; often he resented the duty but remained interested in the phenomenon. And he had no doubts whatever about *her* existence. Nor was he alone in his appreciation of her—all the other children in the tourist court seemed to look on her as a marvel, and a common possession. Repeatedly they assembled around the porch to stare wide-eyed at her. Even Ted Coombes came—he was three years older than Dick and had once thrown him to the ground, knelt on his shoulders and shoved his face into the sand. Eleanor Lefkowitz was there, a fat boisterous little girl just Dick's age, who like himself wore cowboy boots and a gun. And Paco and Pepita, seven and five, who were Mexicans and whose mother did laundry in their galvanized iron hut on the farthest edge of the tourist court. And ten or a dozen others. They formed a semi-circle around Dick and his grandmother—Paco and Pepita, hand in hand, their eyes dark and expressionless, stayed timidly on the outskirts—and sometimes the bolder ones would call out to her. "Gran'ma!" they cried, "How many cars today? Do you want to go to the bathroom now?" She smiled and chuckled without looking around at them, her mild gaze intent on the highway, but she mingled her laughter with theirs, exclaiming, "Oh, thank you, thank you indeed. It's lovely here, nicer than Chicago, I think. But have you seen Mr. Kinslow?"

"Who's Mr. Kinslow?" they demanded, tittering, and the old lady, with a fond simple smile, always replied, "Mr. Kinslow is my loving sweetheart!" Then everybody, old lady and children, laughed delightedly together. Except Dick, who thought it was funny too, but couldn't laugh.

None of the children could ever have seen Dick's grandfather, because he had "died" as Dick's mother had told him, or "passed on" as Aunt Agnes put it, more than twenty years ago. "My Mr. Kinslow is a lovely man!" Grandmother always said, but Dick, looking at the blurred and dog-eared snapshot of him in the family photograph album, couldn't see anything lovely about him. He had a long coarse

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mustache, haggard black-rimmed eyes, tufted eyebrows, and bushy grey hair—he wore a funny stiff suit with a high celluloid collar. For seventeen years he was Yard Superintendent for the Chicago & Central Railroad. "And his voice is lovely too," said Grandmother, "a real Irish tenor. 'The Rose in Your Hair', that's his favorite! How does it go?—" She hummed aimlessly to herself; then with a little pout, "I *do* wish Mr. Kinslow would come straight home from the railroad yards, and not stop in all those low taverns along the way, to drink whisky and sing Irish songs."

"Grandmother, we're *not* there in Chicago anymore," said Dick in a worried tone.

"I know," she agreed, smiling. "That's just what I keep telling Mr. Kinslow! We're not there—we're *here*, where everything is lovely. But he won't listen, he keeps going to those taverns anyway. Oh, he's a *naughty* man, my Mr. Kinslow! Just look—he's made me lose count again."

But once in a while she forgot entirely to count the automobiles—instead she went for a ride on a train, and she described it so well that it couldn't occur to one to doubt its existence. And it was a perfectly lovely train, all new and clean, with seats covered in rich green plush, each with a white lace doily on which to rest the back of your head. As you went around curves, you could see the engine far in front, its big funnel streaming a cloud of smoke, and the only strange thing was that, in all these many cars, Grandmother was the only passenger—you'd think, she mused, that *lots* of people would want to ride on such a lovely train as this, especially since you saw such fine sights out the window. White farmhouses and red barns, silos, sycamore trees, wheat fields and blackberry thickets, nice horses and cows, stone fences and sunflowers all went whizzing by, and there she sat, delighted, but all by herself. Until the conductor came and asked for her ticket. She searched in the pockets of her dress and in her string reticule, and she found all kinds of things—some knitting yarn, a recipe for corn pancakes, a feather from some wild bird, a crab apple, a mousetrap, a piece of birchbark—but no ticket. "I'll ask Mr. Kinslow what to do about it,"

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Grandmother promised apologetically. "He's Yard Superintendent for the Chicago & Central, and he's my loving sweetheart." The conductor saluted her cordially and moved along... Dick spoke up anxiously, "Do you want anything, Grandmother? I'll bring you some iced tea. Or a chocolate bar?"

"No thank you, sir," she replied kindly to this helpful Negro porter. "Don't trouble yourself. Mr. Kinslow will be here any minute! I *do* love iced tea and chocolate bars." Dick brought them to her and she consumed them greedily.

There was only one thing wrong with this lovely train, and not even Mr. Kinslow could do anything about it. "Is there a bathroom on this train?" Grandmother would suddenly inquire, raising herself a little from the green plush seat and gathering her skirts together, prepared to step from car to car in search of it, but there was anxiety in her voice, a small hopelessness, as though she guessed the answer already. Dick took the sleeve of her flannel bathrobe and led her inside the cabin. She hummed and smiled as she walked; her flat straw hat was askew; flip-flop went her slippers. Dick sighed.

Aunt Agnes had a friend, named Mr. Truett. He was a lot younger than Aunt Agnes—he was plump, with blondish hair getting thin on top, blue eyes that beamed amicably behind rimless glasses, a little pursed mouth, and delicate limp white hands. He lived with his mother and an old cocker spaniel in one of the other tourist cabins. It was a horrible cocker spaniel, Dick thought—smelly and mean, with a dirty grey muzzle, and constantly wheezing. Apparently it had asthma. Mr. Truett's mother also wheezed, but it couldn't be asthma because such things didn't exist. She was small, fat, with platinum-dyed curls; she had goggling eyes that popped right at you, seeming to accuse you of unspeakable things. Dressed in orange beach pyjamas and a green eyeshade, she sat sometimes on the porch of her cabin, holding on her knees a typewriter which she pecked at with two fingers. She was a famous writer—her column of *Astral Impressions* was published every week in Los Angeles by The Movement. The Movement, as far as Dick could make out, was something to which

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Mr. Truett and his mother belonged and to which they wanted Aunt Agnes also to belong. But Aunt Agnes, although she seemed completely in agreement, was somehow shy about signing her name to movements.

But certainly she enjoyed entertaining Mr. Truett, who, as she said, gave her courage and confidence. He came almost every afternoon, in a bright pink sport-shirt, bringing books and dozens of little pamphlets; he and Aunt Agnes would drink the tea or lemonade and eat the cookies or fudge that she had been in a fluster to prepare before his arrival, and together they would discuss God, as Sphere, or Plane, or Astral Essence. Even after six months of these visits, she still respectfully addressed him as Mr. Truett, but he from the beginning had called her "dear sister-in-spirit", and always he inquired tenderly about "our dear troubled soul", by which he meant Grandmother. His mother he left behind with her typewriter and the wheezing cocker spaniel, but he constantly paid tribute to her. Almost every sentence, delivered in a sincere and fruity tremolo, began, "As Mother says..." "As Mother puts it, God is a quality as well as a *quantity*." Or, "According to *Mother*, the Astral Essence is present in *every* dear soul—" and he would reach out and with the tips of his little moist fingers fondly caress Dick's face. He gave Dick a book called *The Little Child Jesus, Our Astral Goal*, which was full of difficult words, but had many pictures of the Child Jesus floating out of pink or purple or golden mists—it was all much more colorful than even the Sunday-school stamps. In exchange for two rattlesnake rattles and the bleached skull of a coyote, Dick traded the book to Paco and Pepita, who thought the pictures were beautiful, tore them out of the book, and pasted them over the cracks inside the galvanized iron hut where they lived. The text of the book was used to light a fire under their mother's washtub. When Dick heard of the fate of Mr. Truett's gift, he felt more guilty than ever—it was the end of his friendship with Paco and Pepita.

Nothing amused Dick's mother more than these visits of Mr. Truett—not that she was ever there to witness them. But evenings she would say, her eyes shining and satirical, while

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she pretended to take a special interest in the lighting of a cigarette, "Oh, by the way, Aggie darling, how's your *beau*?" And nothing made Aunt Agnes more pinch-lipped and hairpin-jabbing than this question. "Florrie, I don't know what you're talking about," she would reply quietly, but sometimes, unable to control herself, she burst out, "He's fine—how's *yours*?"

For Dick's mother also had a friend—his name was Dr. Roper. He was a tall heavy-set man, grey-haired, with a fleshy face and dark indolent eyes. He wore neat tropical suits, flashy silky neckties, and diamond cufflinks; many evenings he drove Dick's mother back out to the tourist court in a new cream-colored convertible. And once they drove south together, across the border into Mexico, and stayed there for the weekend. Dick couldn't see why Aunt Agnes should seem so strangely upset by it, although he knew that she disapproved of doctors. He himself rather liked Dr. Roper, who at least had dry hands and didn't fondle him. He gave Dick a football and a pearlhandled penknife, and Dick traded the football to Eleanor Lefkowitz, who was good at such games. She gave him in return *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, warning him that they weren't a bit interesting. When the news got around among the children that he had given his football to a girl, it was the end of his friendship with all of them—Eleanor herself joined in scorning him—but he consoled himself that he had a book back to replace the destroyed one from Mr. Truett. He clung to Dr. Roper's penknife, and when the children gathered around the porch to stare wonderingly at Grandmother, he found himself fingering it in his pocket.

At the request of Dick's mother and over the protests of Aunt Agnes, Dr. Roper gave Grandmother a medical examination. All the children assembled excitedly as he alighted from his cream-colored car, holding aloft a small black suitcase, and Dick led the old lady inside the cabin. "This is quite unnecessary, Florrie," said Aunt Agnes, refusing even to address Dr. Roper, who by now had taken Grandmother away from Dick, placed her in an armchair, and was feeling her pulse. And Grandmother echoed, "Don't trouble your-

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self, sir—Mr. Kinslow will be here any minute." But *this* Negro porter was relentless—he stuck tubes in his ears and listened to her heart, tied cloths around her arm and pumped with a rubber bulb, rolled up her eyelids with his thumb, put a spoon in her mouth and looked down her throat with a little flashlight, while she smiled and protested and giggled in her bemused way. Finally Dr. Roper stood upright, took the tubes from his ears, folded them decisively and tucked them away in his little suitcase, and announced to Dick's mother with a smile of satisfaction, "Flo, it's just as I thought. A clear case of progressive senility. The body tissue in a state of accelerating deterioration... also obviously the brain cells. Heart weak... and I strongly suspect diabetes. The patient needs a *complete* medical examination and extensive treatments... I advise immediate commitment to the State Hospital for the Aged and Insane. If you like, I can draw up the necessary papers."

"Now you *see*, Agnes?" Dick's mother cried triumphantly. "Dr. Roper is a specialist—he *knows* what he's talking about."

"Mr. Truett knows what *he's* talking about, too," said Aunt Agnes.

"That creature? What business is it of his?"

"As much as anyone's," continued Aunt Agnes patiently. "He is coming here this afternoon to read and talk to Mother. There have been remarkable recoveries, Florrie, all attested by universal religion, that once the Light of Truth enters a troubled mind—"

"Light of Truth, my *foot*!" Dick's mother was beside herself with rage. "You mean he has nothing better to do than run after an old maid like you, who could never get a *real* man anyway!"

"I know you've always been the prettier one, Florrie dear." Aunt Agnes's voice was still soft—her head lowered, she was twisting her hands in her apron, and Dick saw her suddenly as heavy and old. "You've had your real men, and I don't see that it's made you any the better. But *my* life has always been our mother—"

"You two women can settle it for yourselves." Dr. Roper

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unexpectedly thundered. He was standing behind Grandmother's chair, and slouching his bulk against it. "But I'm telling you that this old lady is batty as a coot and should be put away in an institution! Who the hell's this Kinslow she keeps talking about?"

"Mr. Kinslow is my loving sweetheart, sir!" piped Grandmother.

"Oh, for Christ's sake," muttered Dr. Roper. He reached around and picked up his little black suitcase; then he laughed genially and patted Grandmother's shoulder. "That's all right, old girl," he said to her. "Come on, Flo, let's get the hell out of here and go have a drink someplace!"—but just then there came a new voice, sincere and melting, from the doorway, "Oh! Excuse me, dear brothers and sisters in Jesus—I hope I'm not *intruding*. But I've come specially to have a nice *chat* with our dear troubled soul..." It was Mr. Truett with a book under his arm.

Dick went outside—all the children were waiting. "Well?" they demanded.

"Dr. Roper wants to send her away to the booby-hatch," Dick reported. "Mr. Truett wants to read things to her. They're all fighting about it now." He saw doubt in their faces, disappointment, envy, even sorrow—they looked from one to another, and seized on the more spectacular alternative. "The booby-hatch!" yelled Dick's enemy, Ted Coombes, and then they all took it up, leaping in a semi-circle, except for Paco and Pepita, expressionless as always on the outskirts. They pointed their fingers at Dick, they threw handfuls of gravel at him and chanted in chorus:

We'll send you away to the booby-hatch,
the booby-hatch,
the booby-hatch!
We'll send you away to the booby-hatch,
At five o'clock in the morning!

He rushed back into the cabin. Four grown-ups stood in a huddle, their voices raised against each other, but Grandmother sat alone, whispering to herself. Dick approached her, his teeth clenched, tears of shame in his eyes. He reached out,

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grasped the brim of her straw hat, and jerked it down so violently over her forehead that the crown split. "I *hate* you!" he said. "*I'll* send you away to the booby-hatch. You crazy dirty old woman, you!"

"Is it Mr. Kinslow?" she cried faintly, struggling to raise the hat from her eyes. But nobody looked around, and Dick fled out of the house.

The automobiles went by and they continued to count them, day after day on the porch of the tourist cabin, she in her bathrobe and patched straw hat, Dick in his cowboy suit. He knew now what he had always suspected, that he was false and evil, and as the days and cars swept by, he even came to rejoice in it. He collected a pile of rocks beside him on the porch to threaten the other children—they howled and jeered a him, but they kept their distance. Now he wanted to help his grandmother count cars. But he noted that more and more often she was riding the train.

Then came the day when Grandmother wasn't able to leave her bed, to go out to the porch and the sunlight. She lay, whimpering a little, in her cramped room in the cabin; the window-shades were drawn, making everything look dusty and obscure; everybody came. Mr. Truett scampered in with his book, Dr. Roper and Dick's mother drove up grimly in the cream-colored convertible, Aunt Agnes folded her hands in her apron, arranged her hairpins, and placed herself heavily beside the bed. Dick stood, trying to conceal himself in the curtained doorway; he knew that the news had spread and that the children were waiting outside. Aunt Agnes made only a small weary protest when Dr. Roper opened his black bag and approached Grandmother—Mr. Truett had already opened his book, and was reading in a clear shrill voice something about, "...out of the darkness of the mind... into the Astral Light..." Dick's mother stood next to Dick in the doorway—he glanced up at her and saw that her eyes looked helpless and suffering.

Dr. Roper had a hypodermic needle in his hand and he was glaring at them all accusingly, especially at Dick's mother.

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He plunged the needle into Grandmother's arm—she gave a little moan and lifted her hands, clasped delicately as though in prayer—Mr. Truett exclaimed on it joyously. "It's *worse* than I thought!" Dr. Roper announced, laying the needle aside. "How the *hell*, Flo, could you let a condition like this go on so long?"—and Dick's mother, her face distorted, her fists beating the air, began to shriek. Dr. Roper took three long steps across the room, seized her by the shoulders and shook her, then raised one broad flat hand with fingers outspread and smashed her across the face. She collapsed sobbing in a chair. Aunt Agnes averted her eyes, Mr. Truett bent over his book—as usual it was all left to Dick. He cried out and flew at Dr. Roper, grabbed his hand and dug his teeth into it, punched him in the belly with his fists, kicked at his legs—Dr. Roper stared down at him for a second in astonishment, the back of his hand flew up, and Dick found himself sprawling against the wall. "Get this damned kid out of here," said Dr. Roper, reaching with his bitten hand for another hypodermic needle.

But nobody moved to obey him, because suddenly Grandmother stopped only whispering and began to talk. Each of them looked around blankly at the others—Aunt Agnes raised her head and leaned forward, Dick's mother left off weeping, Dr. Roper held his needle in mid-air, even Mr. Truett paused in his reading. Nobody paid any attention to Dick, so he stayed, half-hidden by the doorway curtain, and listened to his grandmother.

Her voice was faint, her speech disconnected—all the others strained towards her, and only Dick, in the doorway, knew where she was: again on the train. He recognized the green plush seats and white lace doilies, the sights out the window, the arrival of the conductor, the courteous attentions of the Negro porters, and then suddenly, as had never happened before, the train stopped at a station and she had to get out. She didn't want to, but they told her that her ticket was good only this far. She even reminded them that she didn't have a proper ticket, and they all smiled, the conductors and porters, they were perfectly lovely about it, but they put her off the

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train just the same. It was a deserted little station in farm country; the wooden platform had almost rotted away, and thistles and dandelions grew up between the planks. She tapped on the boarded-up windows and, far inside, a dog barked at her, so she set out on foot along the road. It was a country road, rutted and stony, on one side a stone fence with blackberry thickets and nodding sunflowers, on the other the railroad tracks. She walked and walked, pausing occasionally to pick a few daisies or cornflowers—she couldn't remember for whom—and then she saw him, it couldn't be anybody else. He was skipping along ahead of her, doing a little Irish jig and dressed in his Sunday best, the derby hat and checkered jacket and tightly creased pants and grey suede spats that he wore on his day off from the railroad yards, he was whistling something and twirling his cane, and she called out, "Wait, wait for me, Mr. Kinslow—don't run so fast!"—

"The passage of the dear soul through the Valley of the Shadow!" murmered Mr. Truett ecstatically.

—but he ran even faster, hopping playfully in the air, throwing his cane up and catching it again, glancing from time to time over his shoulder, laughing, and she laughed too, even as she begged him to stop. "Mr. Kinslow, you *rascal*!" she cried out happily. Whenever he was far enough ahead, he leapt nimbly onto the fence and perched there, singing and lifting his hat to her, but just as she almost reached him, he darted away again. She was exhausted with laughter and happiness, but she wouldn't give up, even though her feet hurt her and she kept tripping over her skirts and petticoats. Miles back she had lost her straw bonnet, the pretty one with pink flowers and satin ribbons, that she had bought in the Chicago Emporium, but she didn't care, she ran on and on. The road was getting muddy now, there were rusty cans and torn papers, and the sunflowers were dry, with broken stalks—overhead were cement towers, iron scaffoldings, and flashing red and green lights. Dozens of trains went roaring past, and they weren't lovely trains anymore, they were huge and frightening and they showered her with soot, but still she ran, laughing and begging Mr. Kinslow to stop. And then (it

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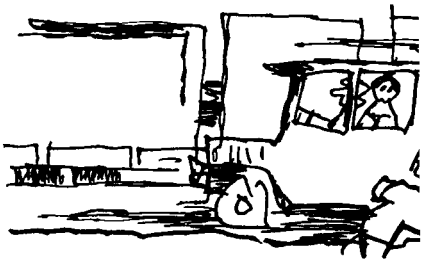

wasn't clear how it happened)—Dr. Roper was bending over her and Dick's mother was helping him, handing him things from the black bag, and *her* eyes now were only for Dr. Roper, eyes of admiration and submission—perhaps Mr. Kinslow stumbled, perhaps he wanted to be caught, anyway she snatched his flying coattails: "I've caught you now, you naughty Mr. Kinslow!" she cried joyfully, "You won't go to those taverns tonight!" And he whirled around, his eyes sparkling, his lips drawn back over his teeth, his little black mustache glistening, and took her in his arms—"*Jack! Jack!*" she screamed, thrashing from side to side in the bed, but she went on laughing, only fainter and fainter, and then she stopped laughing and lay still. Dr. Roper felt her pulse, listened at her chest. Then he stood up straight and shook his head.

The long silence was interrupted by Aunt Agnes. "And there shall be no Death," she quoted suddenly, but her voice was broken, and tears were streaming out of her eyes. Mr. Truett too was sobbing, holding Aunt Agnes's hands; his book lay abandoned on the floor. Dr. Roper and Dick's mother stood together to one side—he had his arm around her. Their eyes were dry and hard. Looking at them all, Dick began to laugh.

He laughed so hard that the tears came—he doubled himself up, clutching his stomach, and ran from the cabin.

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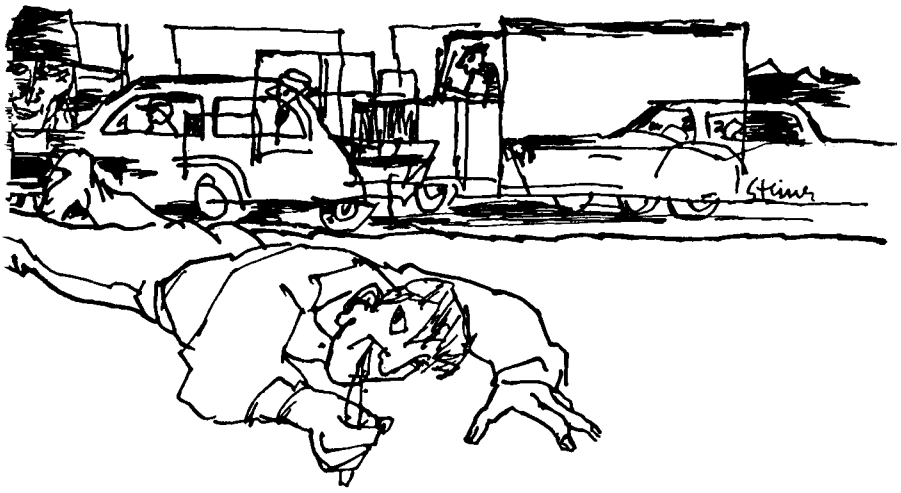

Laughing, he fought through the cordon of children and reached the highway, wove his way between the rushing cars, across into the desert. Somewhere his pistol fell out of its holster, but he hardly noticed, he ran on blindly, until finally he threw himself face downward on the hot sand. He knew this was the way crazy people laughed—still he couldn't stop. Dr. Roper's penknife, open, was in his hand, and he was laughing with Grandmother as he jabbed it again and again into the ground, and turned it, as though he were jabbing and turning it in himself, and would keep doing so forever.

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THE FROZEN SEA

We walked on it, in the very flesh
No different only colder, as was
The sea itself. It was simple as that.
Only, the wind would not have it, would not
Have it: the whiteness at last
Bearing us up where we would go. Screamed
With lungs we would never have guessed at,
Shrieked round us, whipping up the cold crust,
Lashing the rigid swell into dust. It would
Find the waves for us, or freeze out
The mortal flaw in us; then we might stay.
And it was right: it was not any light
From heaven that hurt our eyes, but
The whiteness that we could not bear. It
Turned bloody in our carnal eyes. Virtues
That had borne us thus far turned on us, peopling
The lashed plains of our minds with hollow voices
Out of the snouted masks of beasts. Their
Guts would feed on God, they said. But danger
Had given shape, stiffening shape, to our
Pride, and that sustained us in silence
As we went over that screaming silence.
Yet how small we were around whom the howling
World turned. We could not see half a mile.
And only a soulless needle to tell us where
In the round world we were. We had come so far
To whiteness, and it was cruel in our eyes,
To the pure south, and whichever way we turned
Was north, the sides of the north, everywhere.

—W. S. MERWIN

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THE NEW SUN

The new sun rises in the year's elevation,
over the low roofs' perspective.

It reveals the roughness of winter skin
and the dinginess of winter clothes.

It draws, with a hard forefinger,
a line under the old ways.

Finis! the old ways have become obsolete,
the old skin, the old clothes.

This same sun, like a severe comet,
rises over old disappointments.

But how to accept it? is the problem.
How to bear the pain of renewal?

It makes us cry out in agony,
this peeling away of old sorrows.

When the sun foretells the death of an old sorrow,
the heart prophetically feels itself an orphan;

a little snivelling orphan, and the sun
its hard-hearted parish officer.

Dear gods, help us to bear the new sun!
Let our firm hearts pray to be orphaned!

—JOHN WAIN

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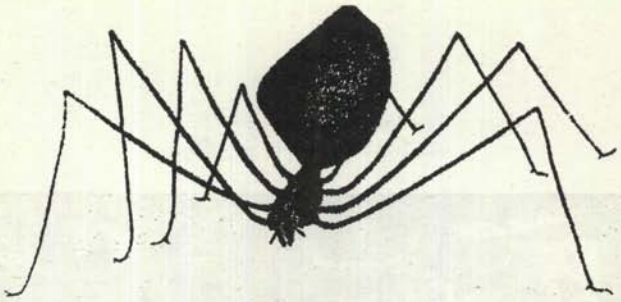

MARIO AVATI is a young Italian living in Paris. Born in Monaco, he was 19 when the war forced him to break off studies at the Ecole des Arts Decoratifs in Nice. After difficult years in Germany he drifted back to Paris and studied painting at the Beaux Arts, but benefited little from the formal training. He learned far more by frequenting the ateliers of Goerg and Cami and others, where he studied the techniques of engraving. Since 1950, he has worked primarily in black and white, exhibiting at many of the important group showings. Last year he was one of the three artists chosen as winners of the Paris Prix des Critiques, the first engraver to be so honored.

The climate of much of Avati's early work is macabre: doll faces with blank smiles ignore a bleak desolation behind them; grotesque puppets strut down sinister back streets with sometimes a forlorn humor in the stance of a figure or the curl of a decorative stroke. These seemed to be the clamorous expressions of the artist's sense of despair and torment. Early designs of insects which appeared in a book of poems by Philippe de Rothschild were more muted and pointed toward the confident mastery of his latest work on beasts of the jungle and the nature morte. *For these last studies of familiar objects, Avati, who has experimented with etchings, dry point, and aquatint, works in the rarely used process called mezzotint: the surface of the copper is first finely grated, allowing the engraver to obtain varying shades of grey. In their austere grandeur, in the delicate balance of angle against curve, are revealed a classical victory over chaos and the endless fascination of transcendent form.*

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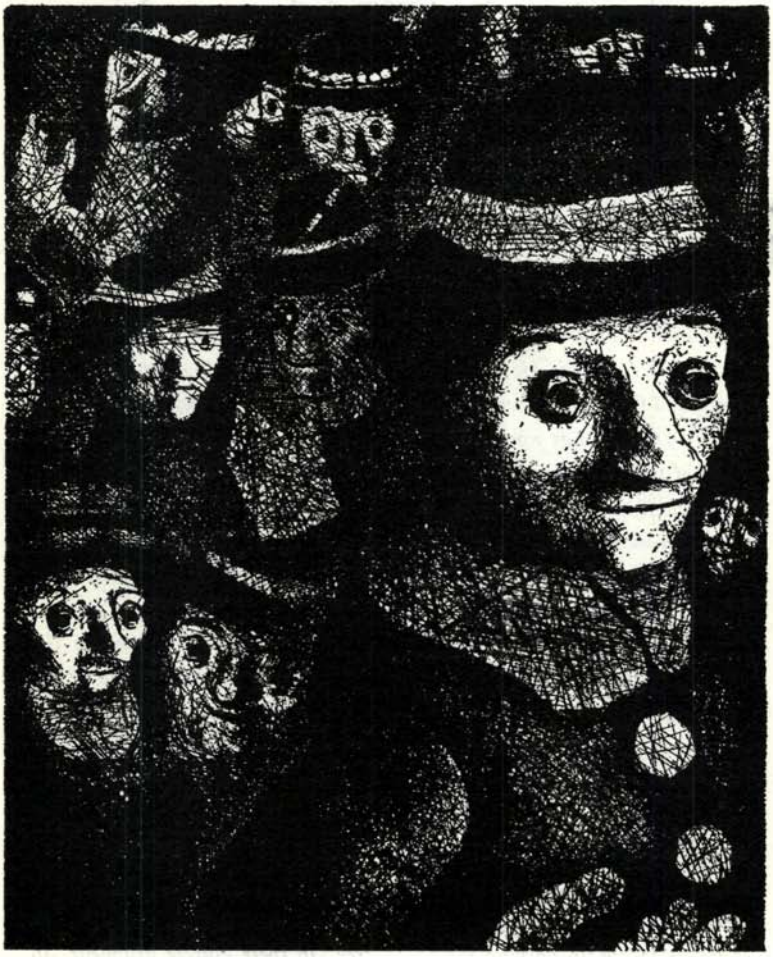

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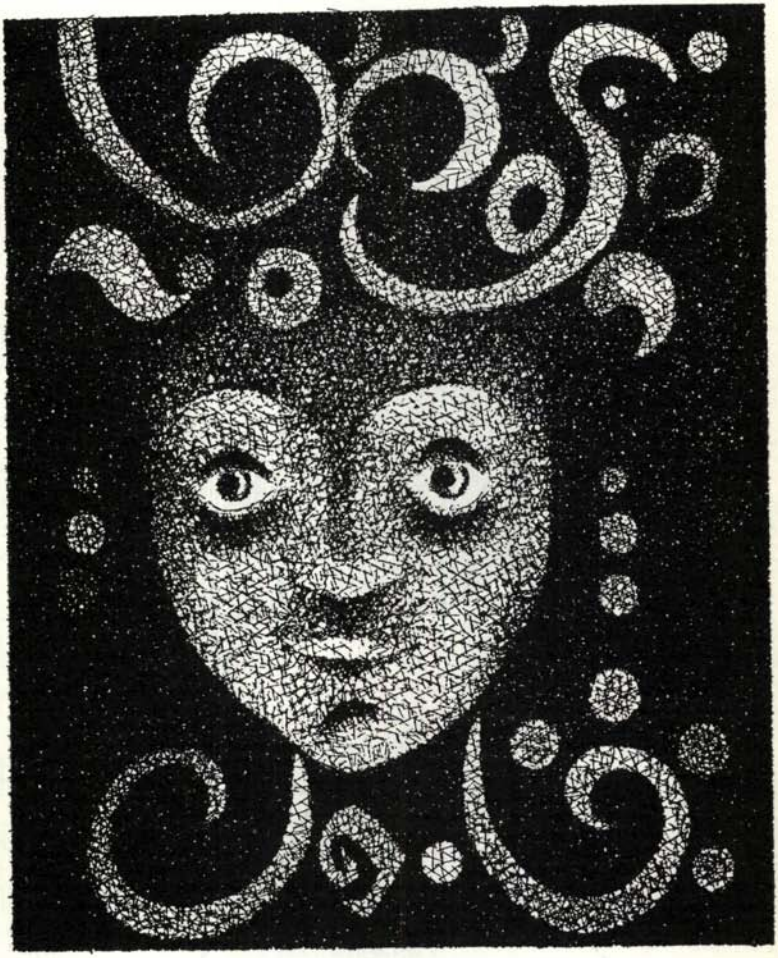

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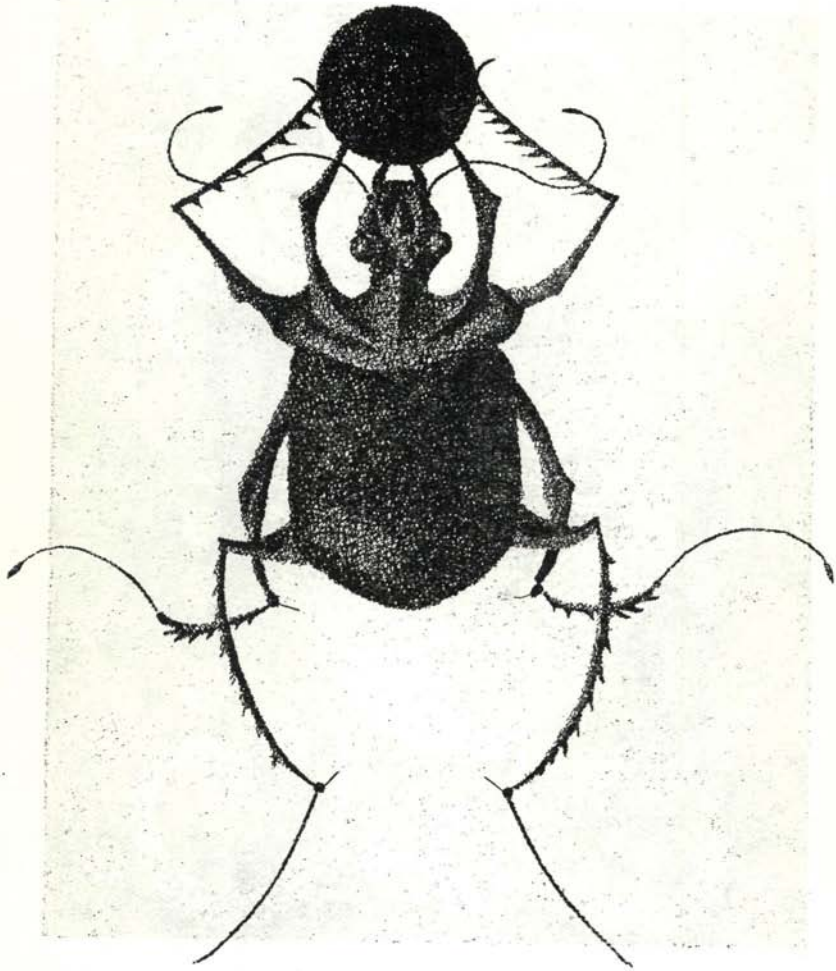

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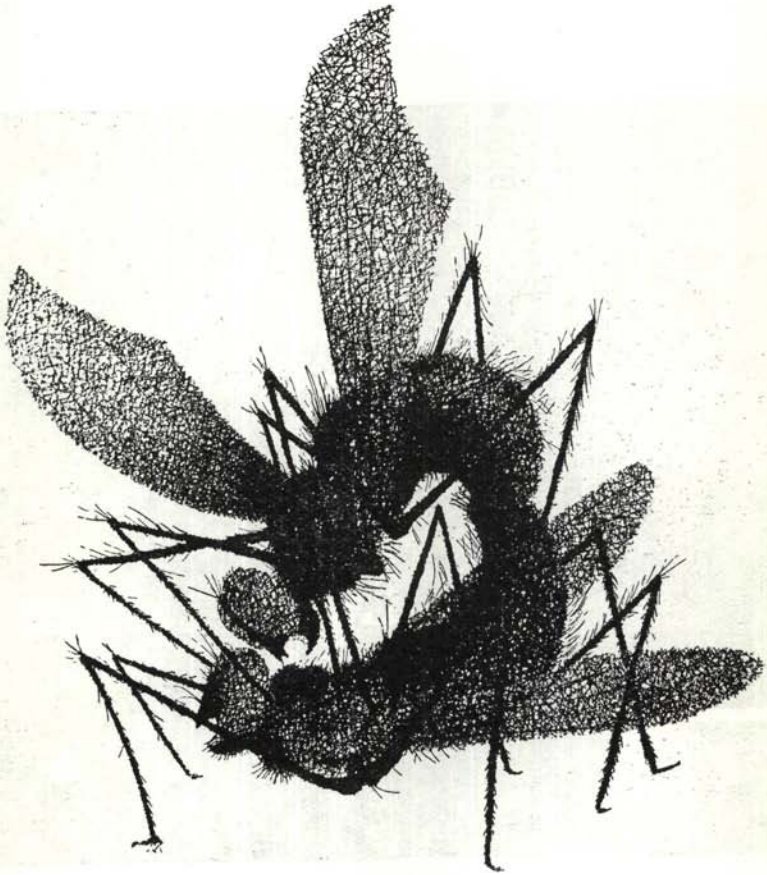

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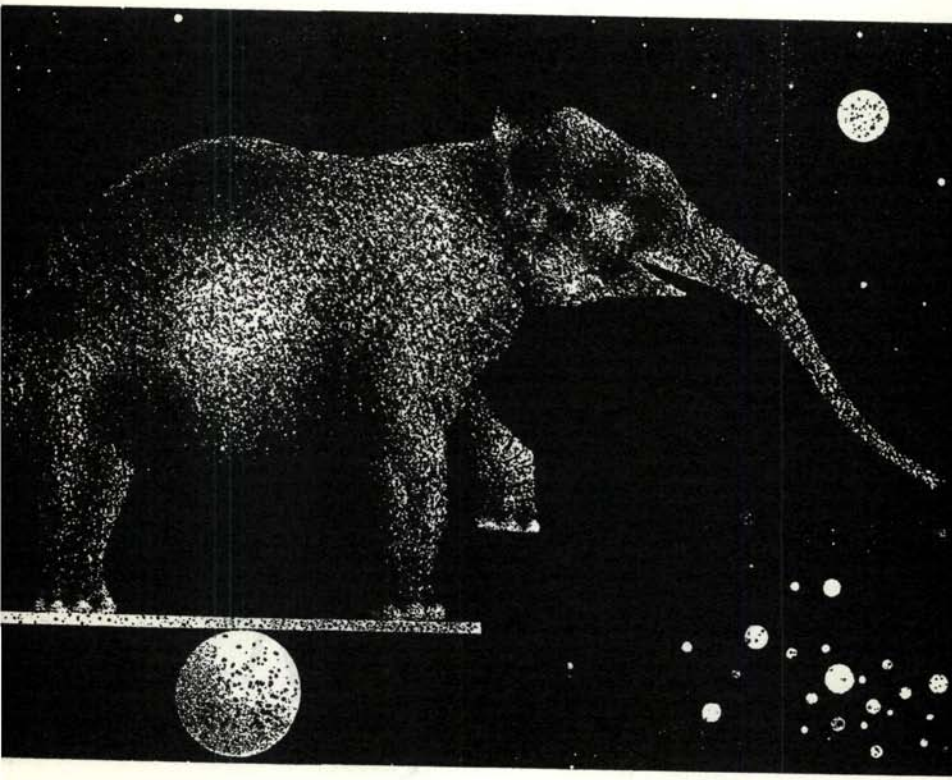

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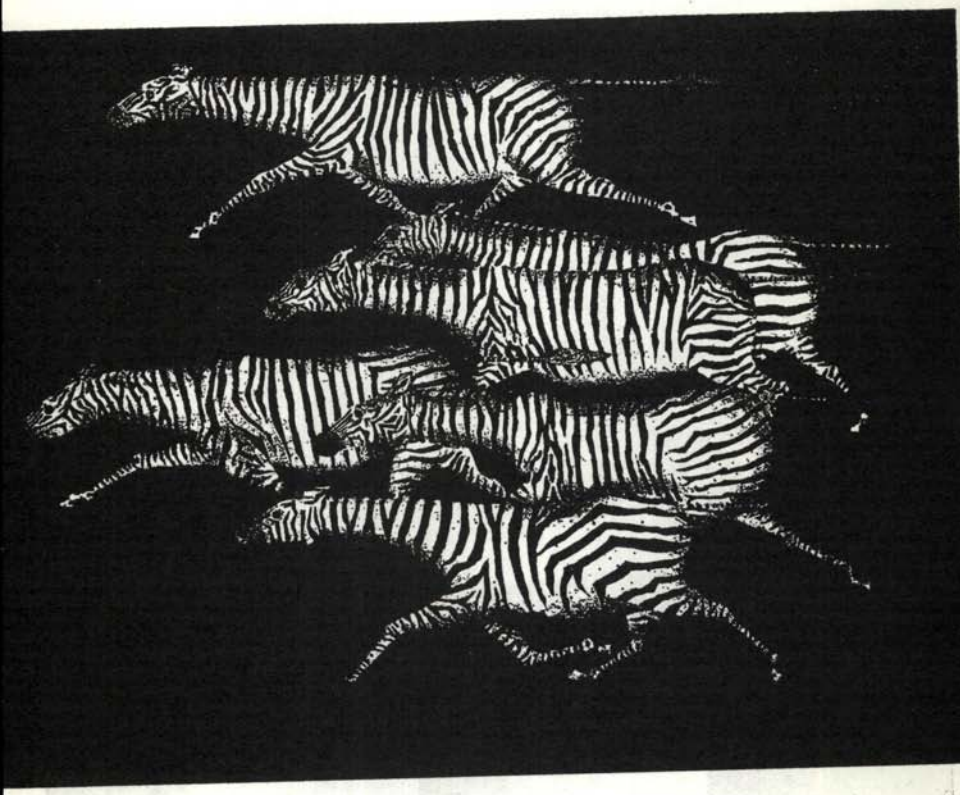

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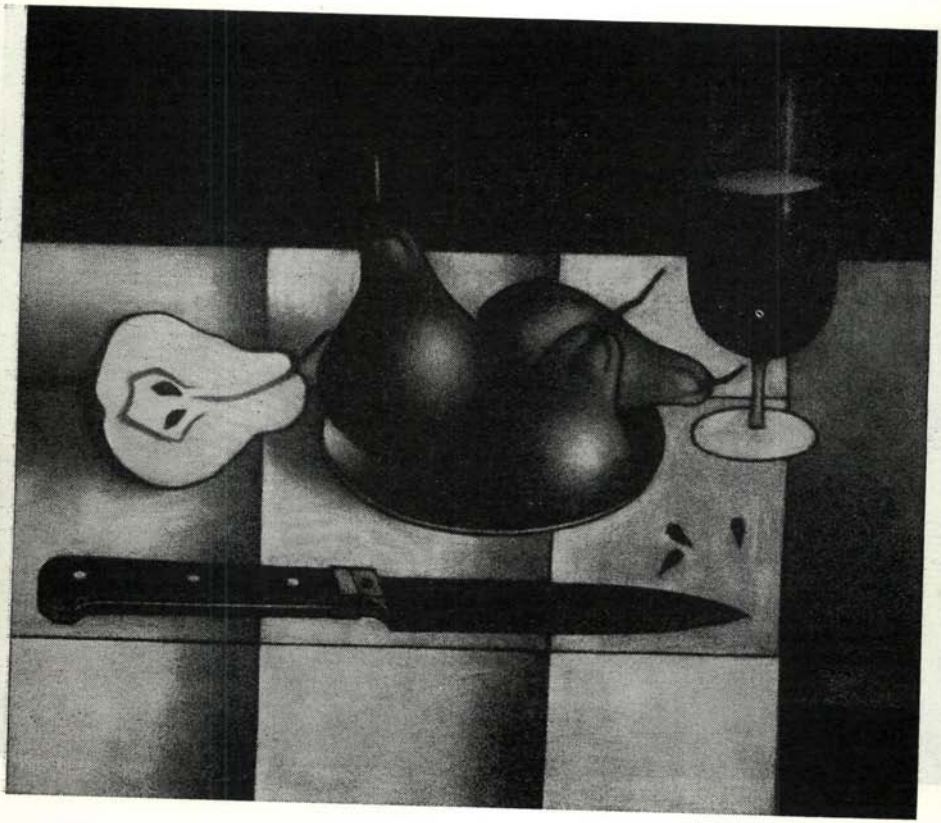

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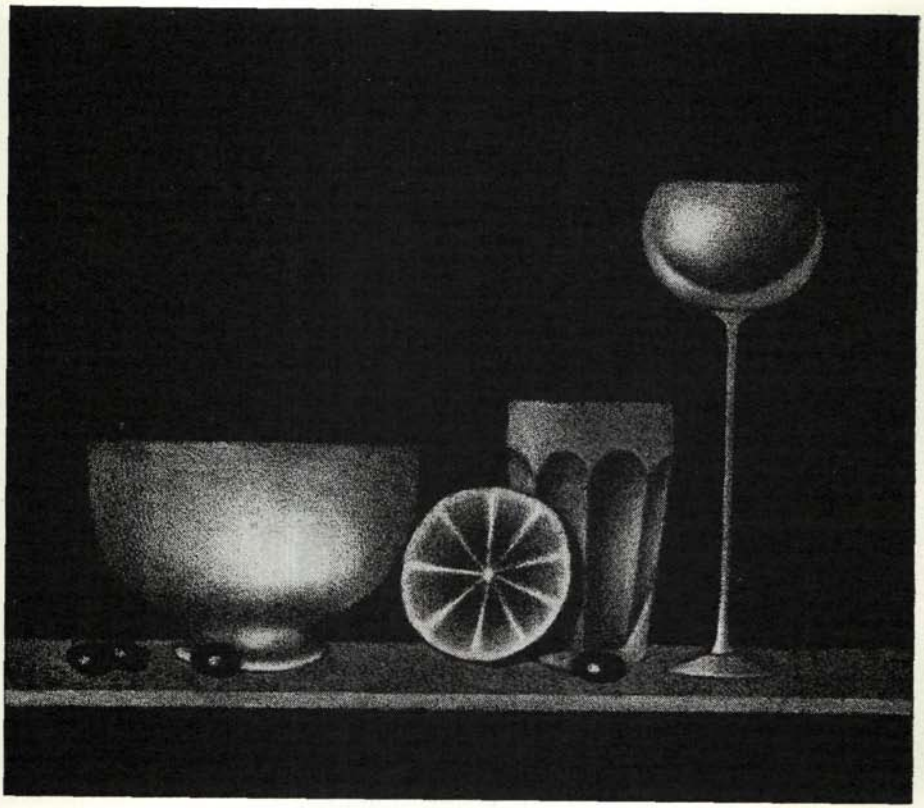

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FIRST FROST

We woke together, arm in arm,
  Deep in the summer loft,
Over the sleeve of ravelled sill
  Crept the delicate frost.

We walked beside the breezy barn,
  The garden sprung its weeds,
The tumbling hares ran everywhere
  To crop the fallen seeds.

We paced the shuttered porch alone,
  A nest of morning stars
Swung to, swung fro above the gate,
  The cold let down its bars.

We saw the eyeless spider build,
  In sounds of old repair,
His night of torn and broken threads
  Across the sagging chair.

We watched the hanging noose of ice
  Swing from the naked copse,
It bound our bodies to the ground
  Across the frozen slopes.

We shut the house, we locked the door,
  The dark strayed down the eaves,
And chumbling through the garden gate,
  The hares jumped into sheaves.

Over the ploughed, uneven fields
  The moon involved the night,
Its cowl of stars, a stoney cave
  Below the tree of light.

—JOHN HAISLIP

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BY THE SEA

"Joe, mach die Musik von damals nach!"

The dark gray receding tide uncovers
New reaches of white sand, and underfoot
Dry bony driftwood moves into the shade
    Growing as cold as
    The sparrow-colored
Cliffs that hover above the beach to mark
The rooted boundaries beyond all which
Nothing made of the sea may pass. The flying
    Onshore winds only
    Flap through an awning

Over the empty beach house. The sun becomes
Paler than one could believe. The treachery
Of memory is probably no deeper now
    Than it is ever,
    But when, toward evening,
Summer shivers into covering darkness
Spreading no particular season's chill
Down the beach, older remembered images
    Invade the prospect.
    Like the preposterous

Youngsters who come prancing over the sand,
Waiting for sundown on the hard cold beach
To send them groping for each other's furry
    Parts, in the blackness
    Of sandy blankets,
Handling the loneliness, the coldest fears
Each has ever known, in the only ways
Occurring to them, we ourselves expend
    Passion on peeping
    (At seascapes, perhaps)

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Or on grabbing a feel of this night air
Nearly as nervously as they. Their rubbish,
Found, at morning, in pools among the rocks
    Manages somehow
    To hold a simple
Bare innocence always (white, floating relics
Of hurried ceremonies, looking fairly
Like the dead blowfish that meander round them)
    Remaining harmless;
    While all the horrid

Nonsense of moments we have left behind
Drifts up onto the shores of consciousness
And waits to betray us. Even this stark scene
    Robbed of its being
    By other beaches,
Winds, sunsets, tides, our own touches of darkness,
Senseless, gauche and inconsiderate gifts
Given us by what once we were, and baited
    With what, in all traps,
    Seems most attractive,

Even this strange new beach becomes, beclouded
By unforgetting eyes, one of the Good
Old Places. And the roaring of the sand's edge
    Tunditur unda,
    Thundering under
High loud breakers blasting the uneven
Tides of silence, alternating with windy
Pianissimi that whimper through the cold,
    Sighing to cadence,
    Is quickly cuddled

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By pampering recollection, in whose embrace
All the wild music is drowned in the Old Song
With the embarrassing title that is lodged
    Deep in our hearing.
    All of its heaving,
Precious banal progressions work toward damping
Everything that purports to be musical.
The stodgiest tune will have its aftermath
    (When once forgotten,
    Or, like the gods of

A place one has been banished from, remembered
In all despite of better judgment) always
Remaining, like the flapping of the wind,
    Tumbling of breakers,
    The gray terns' braying,
Somehow prior to other singing. Faced
With waves, surrounded by sand, tangled in tall
Bundles of crabgrass, we are marooned in strains
    And chords of habit
    Because of having

Faced other beaches, if only remembered
Faintly as being dreamt of, mediating
Between us and the scene before us, fading
    Softly to darkness.

—JOHN HOLLANDER

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And then, the shock as I turned the corner and saw Father at the gate in his house clothes, a ragged trousers and vest, an old cap that came over his eyes and boots cut into something that resembled sandals and that he called his 'slippers.' Father was a creature of habit. No sooner was he out of his working clothes than he was peppering for the evening paper, and if the newsboy were five minutes late Father started strolling down to the main road to look for him. When the boy appeared Father would grab the paper and almost run home, putting on his spectacles as he ran, and ~~making a dive for his own chair at the head of the table by the window.~~ Relaxation never began for Father like he had the paper in his hand.

Suddenly everything would go black out on me, and I would take the chair by the open backdoor while Mother got my supper and asked anxiously how I had got on during the day. Most of the time I could reply only in monosyllables. How could I tell her that nothing happened at work that was not as commonplace and vulgar as the things that happened at home; that nothing ever happened me except the things I could not talk about; those moments of blinding illumination when I was out in the station yard on a spring morning, and, picking my way between the rails and the trucks, realised that it was all only for a moment, that I was a prince in disguise and that I had only to reveal myself or be revealed for everything to fall into its proper place.

This used to make Father mad. He was a talkative man, a garrulous man, and every little incident of the day turned into narrative on him. When some old soldier friend - or even some old woman from the road dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat he would leave everything and chatter. It irritated him when I got up in the middle of the conversation, took my cap and went out quietly. It irritated him even more when I read while he and his friend were talking, and when some question was addressed to me put down my book slowly and looked at him with blank eyes. He was so coarse in grain that he regarded it as insolence. He had no experience of Dukes, and he never heard that interior voice which dictated my movements and my words. 'Slowly the young man lowered the book in which he had been immersed and gazed wonderingly at the man who called himself his father.'

One evening, I was coming home from work when I met Nancy Harding. I had never spoken to her but I knew her brother slightly. They lived in a very nice house up the hill. Her father, a small, brusque, business-like little man was chief clerk in a warehouse in town. Nancy hailed me as though we were old friends, and we went up the road together. She was coming from the house of a friend who had given her the answers to her homework. 'I can't do blooming sums,' she said. She was eager and

A manuscript page from The Duke's Children, *a short story by Frank O'Connor originally published in* The New Yorker.

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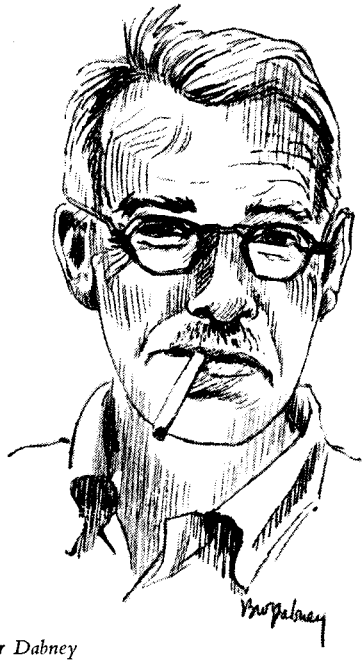

Sketch by B. Whistler Dabney

THE ART OF FICTION XIX

FRANK O'CONNOR

SCENE: Frank O'Connor is of medium height and build; he has heavy silver hair, brushed back, dark, heavy eyebrows. His voice is bass-baritone in pitch and very resonant—what has been described as juke-box bass. His accent is Irish, but with no suggestion of the 'flannel-mouth', his intonation musical. He enjoys talk and needed no urging regarding the subject of the interview. His clothes tend toward the tweedy and casual: desert boots, corduroy jacket, rough tweed topcoat; and a bit of California touch evident in a heavy silver ornament hung on a cord around his neck in place of a tie.

Although a friendly and approachable man, O'Connor has a way of appraising you on early meetings, which suggests the Irishman who would just as soon knock you down as look at

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you, if he doesn't like what he sees. His wife provides a description of an encounter with a group of loitering teenagers while the two of them were out for a walk. A remark of some sort was made; O'Connor whipped over to them and told them to get home if they knew what was good for them. The boys took him in, silvery hair and all, and moved off.

O'Connor's apartment is in Brooklyn, where he lives with his pretty young American wife. The large, white-walled, modern living room has a wide, corner view of lower Manhattan and New York Harbor. The Brooklyn Bridge sweeps away across the river from a point close at hand. On his table, just under the window looking out on the harbor, are a typewriter, a small litter of papers, and a pair of binoculars. The binoculars are for watching liners "on their way to Ireland," to which he returns once a year. He says he'd die if he didn't.

* * *

INTERVIEWER

What determined you to become a writer?

O'CONNOR

I've never been anything else. From the time I was nine or ten, it was a toss-up whether I was going to be a writer or a painter, and I discovered by the time I was sixteen or seventeen that paints cost too much money, so I became a writer because you could be a writer with a pencil and a penny notebook. I did at one time get a scholarship to Paris, but I couldn't afford to take it up because of the family. That's where my life changed its course, otherwise I'd have been a painter. I have a very strongly developed imitative instinct, which I notice is shared by some of my children. I always wrote down bits of music that impressed me in staff notation, though I couldn't read staff notation—I didn't learn to read it until I was thirty-five—but this always gave me the air of being a musician. And in the same way, I painted. I remember a friend of mine who painted in watercolors and he was rather

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shy. He was painting in the city, so he used to get up at six in the morning when there was nobody to observe him and go out and paint. And one day he was going in to work at nine o'clock and he saw a little girl sitting where he had sat, with a can of water and an old stick, pretending to paint a picture—she'd obviously been watching him from an upstairs window. That's what I mean by the imitative instinct, and I've always had that strongly developed. So I always play at knowing things until, in fact, I find I've learned them almost by accident.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you prefer the short story for your medium?

O'CONNOR

Because it's the nearest thing I know to lyric poetry—I wrote lyric poetry for a long time, then discovered that God had not intended me to be a lyric poet, and the nearest thing to that is the short story. A novel actually requires far more logic and far more knowledge of circumstances, whereas a short story can have the sort of detachment from circumstances that lyric poetry has.

INTERVIEWER

Faulkner has said, "Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't, and then tries the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing." What do you think about this?

O'CONNOR

I'd love to console myself,it's that neat: it sounds absolutely perfect except that it implies, as from a short story writer, that the novel is just an easy sort of thing that you slide gently into, whereas, in fact, my own experience with the novel is that it was always too difficult for me to do. At least to do a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* requires something more than to be a failed B.A. or a failed poet, or a failed short-story writer, or a failed anything else. Creating in the novel a sense

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of continuing life—is the thing. We don't have that problem in the short story where you merely suggest continuing life. In the novel you have to create it; and that explains one of my quarrels with modern novels. Even a novel like *As I Lay Dying*, which I admire enormously, is not a novel at all, it's a short story. To me a novel is something that's built around the character of time, the nature of time, and the effects that time has on events and characters. When I see a novel that's supposed to take place in twenty-four hours, I just wonder why the man padded out the short story.

INTERVIEWER

Yeats said, "O'Connor is doing for Ireland what Chekhov did for Russia." What do you think of Chekhov?

O'CONNOR

Oh, naturally I admire Chekhov extravagantly; I think every short story writer does. He's inimitable, a person to read and admire and worship. But never, never, never to imitate. He's got all the most extraordinary technical devices and the moment you start imitating him without those technical devices, you fall into a sort of rambling narrative, as I think even a good story-writer like Katherine Mansfield did. She sees that Chekhov apparently constructs a story without episodic interest, so she decides that if she constructs a story without episodic interest it will be equally good—it isn't. What she forgets is that Chekhov had a long career as a journalist, as a writer for comic magazines, writing squibs, writing vaudevilles, and he had learned the art very, very early of maintaining interest, of creating a bony structure. It's only concealed in the later work. They think they can do without that bony structure, but they're all wrong.

INTERVIEWER

What about your experiences in the Irish Republican Army?

O'CONNOR

My soldiering was like my efforts at being a musician;

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it was an imitation of the behavior of soldiers rather than soldiering. I was completely incapable of remembering anything for ten minutes. And I always got alarmed the moment people started shooting at me, so I was a wretchedly bad soldier, but that doesn't prevent you from picking up the atmosphere of the period. I really got into it when I was about fifteen as a sort of Boy Scout, doing odd jobs for the I. R. A., and then continued on with it until finally I was captured and interned for a year. Nearly all the writers went with the extreme Republican group. People like O'Faolain, myself, Francis Stuart, Peadar O'Donnell, all the young writers of our generation went Republican. Why we did it, the Lord knows, except that young writers are never capable of getting the facts of anything correctly.

INTERVIEWER

And after that, you were with the Abbey?

O'CONNOR

Yes, for a few years. Yeats said, "I looked around me and saw all the successful businesses were being run by ex-gunmen, so I said, 'I must have gunmen,' and now the theatre's on it's feet again." Again, Yeats was a romantic man who romanticized me as a gunman, whereas in fact I was very much a student—I always have been a student masquerading as a gunman. I'd been a director for a number of years and then I was managing director for a period—the only other managing director before me had been Yeats. So I said to him, "What do I do as managing director of this theatre?" And he said, "Well, that's the question I asked Lady Gregory when I was named managing director, and she said, 'Give very few orders, but see they're obeyed'." It must have been about a year after I became a director of the board, when we had at last got the thing organized properly—which it hadn't been for years—that the secretary submitted his report and read out that the balance for the year was one and six pence—about thirty cents—and there was great applause. It was the first time in years the theatre had paid its way.

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INTERVIEWER

What writers do you feel have influenced you in your own work?

O'CONNOR

It's very hard to say. The man who has influenced me most, I suppose, is really Isaac Babel, and again with that natural enthusiasm of mine for imitating everybody, "Guests of the Nation" and a couple of the other stories in that book are really imitations of Babel's stories in *Red Cavalry*.

INTERVIEWER

What about working habits? How do you start a story?

O'CONNOR

"Get black on white," used to be Maupassant's advice—that's what I always do. I don't give a hoot what the writing's like; I write any sort of rubbish which will cover the main outlines of the story, then I can begin to see it. When I write, when I draft a story, I never think of writing nice sentences about, "It was a nice August evening when Elizabeth Jane Moriarty was coming down the road." I just write roughly what happened, and then I'm able to see what the construction looks like. It's the design of the story which to me is most important, the thing that tells you there's a bad gap in the narrative here and you really ought to fill that up in some way or another. I'm always looking at the design of a story, not the treatment. Yesterday I was finishing off a piece about my friend A. E. Coppard, the greatest of all the English storytellers, who died about a fortnight ago. I was describing the way Coppard must have written these stories, going around with a notebook, recording what the lighting looked like, what that house looked like, and all the time using metaphor to suggest it to himself: "The road looked like a mad serpent going up the hill," or something of the kind, and, "she said so-and-so, and the man in the pub said something else." After he had written them all out, he must have got the outline of his story and he'd start working in all the details. Now, I could never do that at all. I've got to see what these people

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did, first of all, and then I start thinking of whether it was a nice August evening or a spring evening. I have to wait for the theme before I can do anything.

INTERVIEWER

Do you rewrite?

O'CONNOR

Endlessly, endlessly, endlessly. And keep on rewriting, and after it's published, and then after it's published in book form, I usually rewrite it again. I've rewritten versions of most of my early stories and one of these days, God help, I'll publish these as well.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep notes as a source of supply for future stories?

O'CONNOR

Just notes of themes. If somebody tells me a good story, I'll write it down in my four lines; that is the secret of the theme. If you make the subject of a story twelve or fourteen lines, that's a treatment. You've already committed yourself to the sort of character, the sort of surroundings, and the moment you've committed yourself, the story is already written. It has ceased to be fluid, you can't design it any longer, you can't model it. So I always confine myself to my four lines. If it won't go into four, that means you haven't reduced it to its ultimate simplicity, reduced it to the fable.

INTERVIEWER

I have noticed in your stories a spareness of physical description of people and places. Why this apparent rejection of sense impressions?

O'CONNOR

I thoroughly agree. It's one of the things I know I do, and sometimes when I'm reading Coppard I feel that it's entirely wrong. I'd love to be able to describe people as he describes them, and landscapes as he describes them, but I begin the story in the man's head and it never gets out of the man's head. And in fact, in real life, when you meet somebody in the

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street you don't start recording that she had this sort of a nose—at least a man doesn't. I mean, if you're the sort of person that meets a girl in the street and instantly notices the color of her eyes and of her hair and the sort of dress she's wearing, then you're not in the least like me. I just notice a feeling from people. I notice particularly the cadence of their voices, the sort of phrases they'll use, and that's what I'm all the time trying to hear in my head, how people word things—because everybody speaks an entirely different language, that's really what it amounts to. I have terribly sensitive hearing and I'm terribly aware of voices. If I remember somebody, for instance, that I was very fond of, I don't remember what he or she looked like, but I can absolutely take off the voice. I'm a good mimic; I've a bit of the actor in me, I suppose, that's really what it amounts to. I cannot pass a story as finished unless I connect it myself, unless I know how everybody in it spoke, which, as I say, can go quite well with the fact that I couldn't tell you in the least what they looked like. If I use the right phrase and the reader hears the phrase in his head, he sees the individual. It's like writing for the theatre, you see. A bad playwright will 'pull' an actor because he'll tell him what to do, but a really good playwright will give you a part that you can do what you like with. It's transferring to the reader the responsibility for acting those scenes. I've given him all the information I have and put it into his own life.

INTERVIEWER

What about adapting your own work to another medium, say movies?

O'CONNOR

Well, I've tried it here and there and generally it's pretty awful. First of all, I've never been really allowed to follow through with a movie as I'd like to do it. One of my sad experiences with the movies is with the film I did for the Lifeboat Society. I was told that my story mustn't sink anything larger than a tiny fishing boat because that was all the money they had; so I wrote the story about the fishing boat—two brothers who wouldn't have anything to do with each other,

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one commanding the lifeboat, the other, skipper of the fishing boat. When the director came down to the location, a magnificent American ship had gone on the sands, and he decided to shift the story and bring in the American ship, so he brought it in. The producer saw the film and said, "But this isn't the story you were told to film!" So, the producer then canned the beautiful thing about the ship, all the money was gone, and they couldn't give me my little boat, and all the thing you had was somebody telling the story. It wasn't the same. What I really enjoy doing is transferring stories to the air. Again, my sort of story is suitable for that. The ones I've seen on television, they don't impress me. Again, they become too precise. Also, of course, there is this awful business in television, even, certainly with the cinema, of the amount of money involved, so that everything has to be tested again, and again, and again; this thing's got be submitted to So-and-so, and So-and-so, and they all lay down different laws and your script is being changed all the time. Finally, what comes over is nobody's job—it's a sort of accident, and sometimes, by accident, you'll get a fairly decent movie or a fairly decent television show. But you never have that feeling you have in the theatre, or in the story, above all (that's the reason I like writing short stories) that you're your own theatre. You can control every bloomin' thing—if you say it's going to be twilight, it's going to be twilight and you're not asking the advice of a lighting man who will say to you, "Well, you can't have a second twilight, you had twilight ten minutes ago, you can't have another one." You can do what you please and you're ultimately the only person responsible. To tell you the truth, I don't think any of this mass media is a satisfactory art form. The real trouble is, the moment you get a mass audience, commercial interests become involved. They say, "Oh, boy! There's big money in this! Now we've got to consider what the audiences like." And then they tell you, "Now you mustn't offend the Catholics, you mustn't offend the Jews, you mustn't offend the Salvation Army, you mustn't offend the mayors of cities." They make a list of taboos a mile long and then they say, "Now,

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inside this, you can say what you like."—and it's maniac.

The moment big money's involved and the pressures are put on that is going to happen. And they're the most wonderful artists in the world. I mean, it's all damn well to talk, but Hollywood has the finest brains in the world out there. But they're up against all these vested interests and vested interests are the very devil for the artist. In the Abbey, the government voted to give us a hundred thousand dollars to build a new theatre, and instantly the intrigues began: who was going to be the manager of this theatre? "This is going to be a really worthwhile job; big money in this, boys." And as long as it was a question of who was going to lose money in accepting this job, you got service. But that is true and that's the really frightening thing about it. The people who want to exploit the forty million are the danger. And they don't want to exploit 'em too far—bless 'em, they're so nice, they're so decent—("I mean, between ourselves, you don't really want to hurt the feelin's of this old Jew down here")—and you don't, you don't! All you know perfectly well is you're not saying anything to hurt his feelings. But somebody is interpreting for him, he's not being allowed to give his own views at all. You get the smart commercial boy who is going to tell you, "Well, what they really like now is a little bit of sadism. Couldn't you introduce just a lit-tle sadistic scene here?" And he'll introduce it all right. Again, the forty million, left to their own decent devices, would probably reject the sadistic thing. They're being told, "Now this is what you like." No, no, you can only do works of art with an audience that you know, with all commercial people left out of it. The great theatre is a theatre like the Abbey, which was really run by a few people in their spare time, and where the actors were working in their spare time; they worked in their offices until five, had a sandwich, came along to the theatre, and the most any of them ever got was six pounds a week, about fifteen dollars, which was the highest salary ever paid while I was there, even for the people on contract.

And then you get real works of art. But the moment Hollywood pops in on the Abbey and says, "Oh, well, we can

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fix those up, we can give him twenty thousand dollars," then they begin screaming against one another, they begin competing.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about the academic approach to the novel as compared to the natural approach?

O'CONNOR

To me, the novel is so human, the only thing I'm interested in—I can't imagine anything better in the world than people. A novel is about people, it's written for people, and the moment it starts getting so intellectual that it gets beyond the range of people and reduces them to academic formulae, I'm not interested in it any longer. I really got into this row, big, at the novel conference at Harvard when I had a couple of people talking about the various types of novel—and analyzing them, and then we had a novelist get up and speak about the responsibilities of the novelist. I was with Anthony West on the stage and I was gradually getting into hysterics. It's never happened to me before in public; I was giggling, I couldn't stop myself. And, "all right," I said at the end of it, "if there are any of my students here I'd like them to remember that writing is fun." That's the reason you do it, because you enjoy it, and you read it because you enjoy it. You don't read it because of the serious moral responsibility to read, and you don't write it because it's a serious moral responsibility. You do it for exactly the same reason that you paint pictures or play with the kids. It's a creative activity.

Take Faulkner; you mentioned him earlier: Faulkner tries to be serious, tries to use all sorts of devices, technical devices, which don't come natural to him, which he really isn't interested in, and gives everybody the impression that he's pompous. Well, he's not pompous, he's naive—and humorous. And what a humorist! There's nobody else to touch him.

The man really is ingenuous. Joyce was not ingenuous. Joyce was a university man. *The Paris Review's* interview with Faulkner reminded me strongly of the description that Robert Greene gives of Shakespeare. All the university men of Shakespeare's

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day thought he was a simpleton, a bit of an idiot. He hadn't been educated, he just didn't know how to write. And I can see Faulkner approaching Joyce in exactly the way that Shakespeare approached Ben Jonson. Ben Jonson had been to a university, Ben Jonson knew Greek and Latin and it never occurred to Faulkner that he was greater than Joyce as it never occured to Shakespeare that he was greater than Ben Jonson. Look at the way he imitates Ben Jonson in *Twelfth Night*—just a typical Jonson play—trying to do the best he can to be like Jonson and all he succeeds in doing is to be brittle. I'm really thinking of the time he came under Ben Jonson's influence—that would have been about the time *Julius Caesar* was produced. Jonson has a crack somewhere or other about Shakespeare's being so uneducated that he didn't even know that Bohemia didn't have a seacoast, and he mentions how he used to talk to the players about the horrible errors in Shakespeare's plays. He quotes from *Julius Caesar*"—Caesar doth never wrong, but with just cause," and he says, "I told the players this was an absurd line." Shakespeare cut it out of *Julius Caesar*, it's no longer there. As a natural writer, Faulkner is a fellow who's got to accept himself for what he is, and he's got to realize that the plain people in Mississippi know a damn sight more about the business of literature than the dons at Cambridge.

INTERVIEWER

How important do you consider technique in writing?

O'CONNOR

I was cursed at birth with a passion for techniques, but that's a different thing entirely. I don't think I'm ever fool enough to imagine that a novel like *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, by Angus Wilson, is a good novel merely because it exploits every known form of technique in the modern novel.* It takes advantage of the cinema; it goes off from *Point Counterpoint*, which itself is full of technical devices, and it's all unnecessary. If you've got a story to tell about people and tell it in the way

* *For Mr. Wilson's comments on Mr. O'Connor's statements, see the interview beginning on page 89 of this issue.*

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in which it comes chronologically, you've got the best thing you can get in fiction. But, you see, one of the troubles about the modern novel is this idea that the novel has to be concentrated into twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours, a week, a month—you must cut out everything that goes before. The classical novel realized that you begin with the conception of the hero and move on from there—you demonstrate him through all his phases. That's where the death of the hero really appears in modern fiction, because the hero doesn't matter any longer, the circumstances are what matter—those twenty-four hours. It *used* to be twenty-four hours in my youth, but there hasn't been a twenty-four hour novel for at least twenty years, as far as I can remember.

INTERVIEWER

Can't you overcome the limits of a time frame with such things as flashbacks and recollections?

O'CONNOR

That's what the cinema has done to the novel. Here, in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, you get a novel which would have been a good novel if it had begun twenty years earlier. A certain crime, a fraud, had been committed on archaeology, and if you traced the people from the fraud on, you'd have had a good novel. What happens? You get the crisis—the old gentleman who suspects a fraud has been committed—what are his moral problems in the last few weeks before he decides he's going to reveal the fraud?—and that's the cinema. This thing, the twenty-four hour novel, began in the Twenties. You get *Ulysses*, you get Virginia Woolf—Everybody was publishing twenty-four hour novels at the time, and the unities had at last been brought back into literature. As though the unities mattered a damn, one way or the other, as though what you wanted in the novel wasn't the organic feeling of life, the feeling, "This is the way it happens"—"if it happened at all, it happened this way."

INTERVIEWER

Can't you use the unities as a convenient framework in which to carry your story, to provide structure?

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O'CONNOR

No, I disagree all along the line. Not in a novel. In flashbacks you describe minor points: at this point, he did this rather than the other thing. You never frequent this man—there's that very good French verb, *fréquenter*, which is the essence of a novel. You've got to be inside that man's head. You're never inside this man's head if at any moment he's got to observe the unities. That's all right in the theatre which is a craft as much as an art.

INTERVIEWER

Of course you have the time and space limitations of the theater.

O'CONNOR

And your audience, which is the biggest limitation of all—the number of things you can do to that audience. It's no use referring that audience to something they've never heard of. You take an audience of Louis XIV's time and you refer to some mythological figure, they knew perfectly well what you were talking about, but no use doing that nowadays—nobody'd know what you were talking about.

This construct novel, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, falsifies the novel from the word go. Having been a librarian, I understand it perfectly, because your job when you're making a catalogue is to provide all the cross-references you're ever likely to need. So this is a book about Irish archaeology, but its got an awful lot about modern American history, and consequently you give a cross-reference to American history and if you're a really good cataloguer, that thing is a set of cross-references so that anybody who wants to find out about modern American history can find it out in Irish archaeology. False surprise, I think, is the real basis of it.

INTERVIEWER

As Edmund Wilson said, "Who cares who killed Roger Ackroyd?"

O'CONNOR

I care, passionately. That's a different thing, entirely. I'm

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fascinated by detective stories. There you get a real form—you don't get this fake form imposed. At least it's a passionate, logical structure. Somebody killed this guy. Who killed him? And if you have a real writer on the job, you can get wonderful effects.

INTERVIEWER

But they haven't much in the way of characterization, have they?

O'CONNOR

Gosh, some of the good ones have. And very good characterization, too. Even Erle Stanley Gardner. Perry Mason, when he began, was a real character—he's become a prototype now— he was a real person and you could feel him striding into a room. I could see that man.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know James Joyce?

O'CONNOR

As well as one can know a man one has met a couple of times. He was shy in a different way from Faulkner. He was arrogant in a way that Faulkner is not arrogant.

INTERVIEWER

Joyce's looks were sort of against him, don't you think?

O'CONNOR

An extraordinarily handsome man! He gave the impression of being a great surgeon but not a writer at all. And he was a surgeon, he was not a writer. He used to wear white surgeon's coats all the time and that increased the impression and he had this queer, axe-like face with this enormous jaw, the biggest jaw I have ever seen on a human being. I once did a talk on Joyce in which I mentioned that he had the biggest chin I had ever seen on a human being and T. S. Eliot wrote a letter saying that he had often seen chins as big as that on other Irishmen. Well, I didn't know how to reply to that.

So now to get on back to what we were saying about the

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university novelists versus the natural novelists. The university novelists have been having it their own way for thirty years and it's about time a natural novelist got back to the job and really told stories about people. Pritchett argued, (I wrote this book on the novel—I don't know whether you've seen it—*The Mirror in the Roadway*) that this conception of character has disappeared entirely, the conception of character that I am talking about. You see, I don't believe there's anything else in the world except human beings, they're the best thing you're ever likely to discover, and he says, "Well, this is all finished with." And I know what Pritchett means: the Communists and so on have got rid of it all, there aren't individuals any longer. You get old Cardinal Mindszenty in and you give him the treatment, so he comes out and says what you want him to say. There are no individuals. What I can't understand is why, in America, the last middle-class country, you still cannot beat this loss of faith in the individual.

I've had this argument out. I was reviewing for a London newspaper and a British intelligence officer who was also a novelist wrote a book in which he defended the use of torture against prisoners. My paper was conservative and I asked, "How far can I go?" and they said, "You can go the limit." We asked their lawyers in and they said, "Say what you want to say"—and I did. They were magnificent about it. But that book was reviewed in the left-wing journals and they saw nothing wrong with this defense of torture. I know perfectly well you can make a human being say anything or do anything if you torture him enough, and that does not prove that the individual doesn't exist.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't the unseen and unrevealed, the subconscious, have a bearing on the truth about an individual?

O'CONNOR

We were talking about the twenty-four hour novel: to me, that's all represented by Joyce, talking about epiphanies; in

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fact, you can never know a character. At some moment he's going to reveal himself unconsciously and you watch and then you walk out of the room and you write it down, "So-and-so at this point revealed what his real character was." I still maintain that living with somebody, knowing somebody, you know him as well as he can be known—that is to say, you know ninety per cent of him. What happens if you're torturing him or he's dying of cancer is no business of mine and that is not the individual. What a man says when he's dying and in great pain is not evidence. All right, he'll be converted to anything that's handy, but the substance of the character remains with me, that's what matters, the real thing.

INTERVIEWER

As I recall at Harvard, some of the students thought that ignoring the psychological was old-fashioned.

O'CONNOR

And I am old-fashioned! It's the only old-fashionedness you can come back to. You've got to come back eventually to humanism, and that's humanism in the old sense of the word, what the Latins and Greeks thought about human beings, not the American sense of the word, that everybody is conditioned. The Greek and Latin thing says, "No, this is a complete individual." That's the feeling you get from Plutarch, that people are as you see them, and no psychiatrist is going to tell you anything fundamentally different. If he does, he's an ass, that's all. People are as they behave. You're working with a man for years. He's kind in the great majority of the things he does. You say, "He's kind." The psychiatrist says, "No, no no, he's really cruel," and you're faced with this problem of which are you going to accept: the evidence of your own senses, of your own mind, of your own feeling of history, or this thing which says to you, "You don't understand how a human being works."

INTERVIEWER

What about the problem of the struggling writer who must make a living?

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O'CONNOR

Now, that's something I can't understand about America. It's a big, generous country, but so many students of mine seemed to think they couldn't let anyone else support them. A student of mine had this thing about you mustn't live on your father and I argued with him. I explained that a European writer would live on anybody, would live on a prostitute if he had to—it didn't matter;—the great thing was to get the job done. But he didn't believe in this, so he rang up his father and told him he'd had a story refused by the *New Yorker*, and his father said, "I can keep you for the next forty years, don't you think you can get a story in the *New Yorker* in forty years?" Well, this fellow came along and told me this tragic tale. Now, I felt the father was a man I understood and sympathized with, a decent man. But the boy felt he mustn't be supported by his father, so he came down to New York and started selling office furniture.

INTERVIEWER

Why don't you teach?

O'CONNOR

I can't make a living out of it. You can only just get by on the sort of salaries that universities pay. I didn't write a line while I was at Harvard. You've nothing left over to write—I'd just get involved with the students all the way. I was far more pleased with a student's successes than I would have been with my own and that's wrong. You've got to leave a bit of jealousy in yourself.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think of a novel as a lot of short stories or one big short story?

O'CONNOR

It ought to be one big short story, and not one big short story, but one big novel. That's the real trouble—the novel is not a short story—there's your twenty-four hour novel—that's what's wrong with it, it's a short story, and that's what's

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wrong with Hemingway, wrong with most of them, the span is too small. The span of a novel ought to be big. There is this business of the long short story turned out as a novel, and I'm all the time getting them. The span is too brief; there is nothing to test these characters by. Take *Ulysses*, which is twenty-four hours, and I maintain it's a long short story. And it was written as a short story, don't forget that. It was originally entitled "Mr. Hunter's Day." And it's still "Mr. Hunter's Day" and it still is thirty pages. It's all development sideways. That's really what I was talking about: the difference between the novel which is a development, an extension into time, and this novel, which is not a novel but an extension sideways. It doesn't lead forward, it doesn't lead your mind forward. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is the same: "So now boys, having finished with this brief moment of our novel, we'll go backward for awhile." And all the time they're just going out like that because they're afraid to go forward.

INTERVIEWER

O'Faolain talks about that: Hemingway trying to isolate his hero in time—trying to isolate him to one moment, when he is put to the test.

O'CONNOR

O'Faolain made a good point about Hemingway there. He's saying, "Nothing happened to him before the story begins; nothing happens to him afterward." And I think that's true of most short stories. He's talking about a special aspect of Hemingway—that Hemingway will not allow the character to have had any past. You admit he's had a past, but you say that the whole past is illuminated by the particular event which you are now telling, also the whole future; you can predict a man's development from this. I admit that from the point of view of the short story, you ought to be able to say, "Nothing that happened before this short story is of real importance, nothing that happens after it is likely to be of great importance." But you don't try to cut it off, which is what Hemingway does. You just say, "This is so unimportant that I'm not going to mention it at all."

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INTERVIEWER

What do you think about regional influences in American literature?

O'CONNOR

I attribute all good literature in America to New England—including Katherine Anne Porter.

INTERVIEWER

What about Willa Cather?

O'CONNOR

There you get this tremendous nostalgia for plains, the longing for New England, and the longing for a sense of belonging somewhere, so then she runs away to Halifax to try to get it, and when that doesn't do she goes right down to New Mexico in order to get the Catholic tradition. But she's really a New Englander who never settled down. She's a D.P. writer—and a great writer.

INTERVIEWER

What is the greatest essential of a story?

O'CONNOR

You have to have a theme, a story to tell. Here's a man at the other side of the table and I'm talking to him; I'm going to tell him something that will interest him. As you know perfectly well, our principal difficulty at Harvard was a number of people who'd had affairs with girls or had had another interesting experience, and wanted to come in and tell about it, straight away. That is not a theme. A theme is something that is worth something to everybody. In fact, you wouldn't, if you'd ever been involved in a thing like this, grab a man in a pub and say, "Look, I had a girl out last night, under the Charles Bridge." That's the last thing you'd do. You grab somebody and say, "Look, an extraordinary thing happened to me yesterday—I met a man— he said this to me—"and that, to me, is a theme— the moment you grab somebody by the lapels and you've got something to tell, that's a real story.

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It means you want to tell him and think the story is interesting in itself. If you start describing your own personal experiences, something that's only of interest to yourself, then you can't express yourself, you cannot say, ultimately, what you think about human beings. The moment you say this, you're committed.

I'll tell you what I mean. We were down on the south coast of Ireland for a holiday and we got talkin' to this old farmer and he said his son, who was dead now, had gone to America. He'd married an American girl and she had come over for a visit, alone. Apparently her doctor had told her a trip to Ireland would do her good. And she stayed with the parents, had gone around to see his friends and other relations and it wasn't till after she'd gone that they learned that the boy had died. Why didn't she tell them? There's your story dragging the reader in, making the reader a part of the story. You're saying all the time, "This story is about you—De te fabula."

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the writer should be a reformer or an observer?

O'CONNOR

I think the writer's a reformer; the observer thing is very old, it goes back to Flaubert. I can't write about something I don't admire—it goes back to the old concept of the celebration: you celebrate the hero, an idea.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you use a pseudonym?

O'CONNOR

The real reason was that I was a public official, a librarian in Cork. There was a big row at the time about another writer who had published what was supposed to be a blasphemous story and I changed my name, my second name being Francis and my mother's name being O'Connor, so that I could officially say that I didn't know who Frank O'Connor was. It satisfied my committee, it satisfied me. The curious thing now

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is that I'm better known as Frank O'Connor than I'll ever be as Michael O'Donovan. I'd never have interfered with my name except that it was just convenient and I remember when I did it I intended to change back, but by that time it had become a literary property and I couldn't have changed back without too much trouble.

INTERVIEWER

Have you any particular words of encouragement for young writers?

O'CONNOR

Well, there's this: Don't take rejection slips too seriously. I don't think they ought to send them out at all. I think a very amusing anthology might be gotten up of rejection letters alone. It's largely a question of remembering, when you send something out, that So-and-so is on the other end of this one, and he has certain interests. To give an example of what I mean on this rejection business, I had a story accepted by a magazine. So I wrote it over again as I always do, and sent it back. Well, someone else got it and I got this very nice letter saying that they couldn't use it, but that they'd be very interested in seeing anything else I wrote in the future.

—ANTHONY WHITTIER

(This is the nineteenth in a series on the Art of Fiction. Authors interviewed have included E. M. Forster, François Mauriac, Graham Greene, William Styron, Irwin Shaw, Alberto Moravia, Joyce Cary, Ralph Ellison, Georges Simenon, James Thurber, Nelson Algren, William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, Isak Dinesen, Thornton Wilder, Truman Capote and Robert Penn Warren. An interview with Ernest Hemingway will appear in the next issue.)

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ON FORGETTING TO SET MY ALARM CLOCK

Once to wake proud in a burst of sunlight
as bearing news of real significance,
to risk cold coffee for this native hour
unembarrassed at much cruel rapture
and clothed with an astonished nakedness
the other animals must remember:
those brunts of darkness in the opened eye
which must accept all the retributions
called justice, called civilizing peace;
to know that moment, pleasure of action,
of a world swayed by irrelevant tides
where men scorn beds made simply for sleep,
is life at a high price, without napkins,
minus the morning editorial,
an unimaginable self-respect
of the very young and the very old,
those who fear discipline as they fear death.

—JASCHA KESSLER

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INITIAL

(For Eugenio Montale)

'And so Beatrice became an obsession with Dante.'
—NEW INTERPRETATION

Passing out of a great city
A flower in confusion,
I, the speaker, and you, the listener;
You, who would never listen except through words,
Learning with your clay implement,
Moving to change even in daylight,
And I, holding neither the middle way
Of this direction nor any part
Valid for measurement, will lead
Dead Virgil through my private world.

Finding that the wood has not altered,
The Leopard, the Lion
They remain constant, and through them is forward,
And they as unshaken as stone beasts
On the walls, laughing at enemies;
Mating with their bodies after death,
Fruit of a human craftsman;
But He knowing the Hound
From outside, and he with me
Walking equal, the Knowledge and Discord.

How he would come retrieving
Hostages from night,
The way still periculous, overstarred
By new refinements of space: buildings
Settle their grand lumber near incurious skies,

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Night blows setting the card
Face downwards, the hand of daylight
Gropes for rescuing fingers,
Finds none, and relapsing slides
Beneath view by its ultimate candle.

The river an eye of bad mirrors
Drawing her face,
A distributed mask on their breaking;
And she, not so much present
As remembered where there is separation
Of whole things: a moment of incaution
And the face gives its relic,
Waits for surprise at the move
Waits for its equal, knows none.
Eyes above it. Knowledge and Discord.

I will watch here for the movement,
Not as the ghost
Appears once under lamplight, seen clearly
And then dissolves, a pattern of houses
His backcloth, dwarfed by comparison
Of wires wires in a no-man's-land: web
On the word as a face stranded
Between spidered branches,
Framed weakly—extending
Without edge. The focus is altered.

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Now the somewhere is plain, the rhymes
Run to refuse,
In spite coherence is lost, the names
Of anonymous trees which make this now
Are recalled, the word goes to barter:
Bodies and wheat are ploughed up, the Willow
Remains asserting its sadness;
The last husk of the pearl droops
To dust, her body before me
Emerges a spire to the sun.

This place, this time: all other
Exhausted through love.
Quicksands graze at your harbours,
Shaft at the breakers, tidal, temporary
Report you, too tall for their depth;
On this inner day of the year, fall
Of the meteor cargoed with red veins
Flows branches between, overcoming
Heat, slows the pulse, the Pole-
Star held as a shield.

This time, and the manic dance
Starting differently,
New rhythm of feet, it is You,
New wings to the eye, cone to the heart,
Precipice of lips to the next spending,

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And then again. It is not the lights
Of a city, one by one weakening
The roots of feet growing dark, these threads
Cannot bear them: outwards the sand
Wrinkles in the same folds,
And yet differently.

Matching the foot to the furrow,
Unvenomed in Eden,
The short measure divides, music flattens,
A moment, the Queen flashes to cardboard, situations
Flung out wild, paper-decks for a generation.
Silver the serpent uncoils from his tree, silver
Bad mirrors look back; the Lion laying proud paw
On their surface uncovers a head,
It was that dancer they told of,
Water the last valley.

Dead by his own rib. Beatrice
Is Eve with a human
Example: for short pleasure, long displeasure;
It was that dancer, Fantastick, tripping lightly,
Missing the shore he stumbled to deep stones,
Joined with the beast, unexpected
Mingling; bellowed from the maze
To the rampart: "Is there no sound
Thing that I may devour?" But He with me
Treading equal. Knowledge and Discord.

—ARTHUR BOYARS

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JAMES BLAKE

Day of the Alligator

RIDING back to the stockade after the long and leaden day on the road, Dooley sat stripped to the waist on a plank that crossed the body of the truck, looking at the pines, sand and palmettos.

Friday. The week-end Olympics again. Night games. God, if only—I hope he can't get any ephedrine tonight.

He looked back at Barton sitting massively on the tail-gate, brown back and yellow hair gleaming in the late sunlight. He was swinging his feet and singing "When It's Twilight On the Trail"—*doy-doy doy doy doy doy doy, doy-doy doy doy doy*—the raucous voice rebounding from the wall of the woods.

Why did I feel so absurdly pleased when I found out he knew that tune? Like watching him graduate. You've come a long way from your civilian days, father of none.

Barton caught Dooley looking at him and the look he returned mixed amusement with irritation.

"Whose baby are you?" he said sternly.

"Daddy's baby," said Dooley.

"What kind of a daddy?"

"High-rollin' daddy."

"And who's your high-rollin' daddy?"

"You are, Daddy."

"Just don't forget it."

The other cons roared at the stale and familiar exchange.

Dooley turned to stare again at the passing trees.

An evil night when I fell into that routine. Even a straight delivery doesn't save anything.

The truck was passing through heavily-wooded country now, pine forest on either side. This was the spot where so many prisoners had jumped off into the woods. He looked back at the two shotgun guards in the trailer behind the truck.

–Drawing by Reginald Pollack

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When they remembered, they would sit up straight at this spot, grasp their guns, and look straight ahead with such a charged air of dissembling alertness that Dooley always felt oddly gratified.

The truck slowed at the approach to a wooden bridge across a creek. Looking down, Dooley saw a huge alligator, looking up.

Everybody yelled at once. "Stop the truck, Cap'n!" "Gator back here, Cap'n!" Somebody banged on the top of the truck's cab.

The truck drew to a stop at the side of the road. Cap'n Clark slowly unfolded his long old bones from the front seat of the truck. He pulled off the cork tropical helmet he wore, and stood glaring wildly from the guards to the prisoners.

"Big gator back here, Cap'n," Barton explained. "Could we please go back and see him, Cap'n? He's a great *big* bastard, sir."

The two guards had dismounted from the trailer and stood leaning on their shotguns. The driver of the truck, a burly young cracker with the eyes of a doe, got out and started back towards the bridge, pulling his pistol from the holster.

"Better put that gun up, Kern," the old man stopped him. "You know better than to shoot a gator."

The driver, coloring, put up his gun.

"All right, c'mon everybody wants to see the gator." Cap'n Clark started towards the bridge.

The men jumped in noisy confusion off the truck to follow, trying to rattle one of the guards, who was new on the job and had been getting it all day.

The alligator lay in a sunlit mud-patch on the bank. Someone made a sudden noise and with a great heave and flash of its belly it slid into the water and vanished beneath the bridge. Some of the crew hung over the railing, peering, anxious to prolong the diversion.

Cap'n Clark turned towards the truck. "All right, all right, let's ramble, we're runnin' late now."

"Ramble!" they hollered, and scrambled noisily back up on the truck.

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All the way in to the stockade, Barton kept outlining to Bayou Boy, the big ramrod of the crew, a scheme for capturing the alligator alive, involving a rope, and "downwind" and a leap from the bridge on to the alligator's back.

Dooley heard eager excited snatches of it as he faced into the wind.

He's transported by it. And I feel touched and warmed by his eagerness. Fearful for the boyish awkwardness. Aaah God.

In the prison dormitory Dooley waited his turn at the long row of taps in the washroom. He washed slowly and the room was deserted when he was combing his hair.

Canfield came in, a plump young man with a crew cut from San Francisco. An airline pilot, in for forgery, to Dooley his coming to the prison farm had been an advent. Riding out in the morning to the job, back at night, each had discovered in the other a listener and a companion.

Canfield knew all the names and labels, Fauré, Firbank, Fonteyn, Fats, and told long serpentine stories of rainy weekends in New Haven, of what the boy from Amherst had said, all in a half-petulant tone that suggested everything had been a tedious mistake.

He stood beside Dooley at the mirror, combing his hair, carefully pressing forward the beginning of a small curl over his forehead. He said wearily:

"How are you and Apollo Belvedere getting along?"

"Not too bad." Dooley leaned into the mirror. Dishing with Canfield was a thing he would never understand, and never forego. "He found an alligator he wants to rassle."

"He found a what?"

"An alligator." Dooley gave a small pained shrug. "And he's going to leap off a bridge on to its back. Bring it back alive."

"Oh no. Mowgli the Alligator Boy."

A small shame crept into him, but he went on,

"Bayou Boy is coming from *down-wind*, with a rope—I think—Well, it's not too clear, of course—But we all goan have *alligator* shoes bye 'm bye."

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"All God's *chillun* got alligator shoes!" They collapsed into silent laughter. The room was suddenly quiet, only the soft pleasantly stricken sounds of muffled mirth. Dooley straightened and saw himself in the mirror.

"C'mon, cut it out now man, yawl act like yawl against alligators." He reached for the comb and looked up to comb his hair.

In the glass he saw Barton, buttoning his pants, coming around from a row of toilets that was screened from the mirror. He came over and stood behind them, examining his nails.

Canfield hurriedly finished combing his hair.

"Time for chow," he muttered, and fled.

Dooley watched his own stricken face in the glass and combed his hair with careful attention.

Barton stood inspecting himself, yellow hair brown face brown shoulders, in the mirror.

"Alligator shoes for all," he murmured. "I've always wanted to deck you good anyway, Carhart."

The washed-blue eyes that Dooley sought in the mirror were implacable with hatred.

"Bart, I didn't want—"

"It was *amusing*, wasn't it?" He gave it the languid inflection of Canfield.

"Bart, look—"

Chow call sounded. Barton turned away from the mirror.

"You better not go in for chow tonight. If I have to look at you, I'll puke. Get over on the bunk and stay there."

"Jesus Christ, Bart, I'm hungry as a bitch! Look man, don't—"

Barton turned, motioned with his head.

"Over on the bunk. And when I come back I'm going to try to kill you."

He lay face down across the double-bunk in the deserted dormitory, listening to the busy clacking of spoons on plastic plates in the mess-hall. Heavy with a dreary certainty, he reached over and turned on the radio. Sarah Vaughn came on, singing "If You Could See Me Now." The sinuous silver

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of the music trailed in the air...

He thought of how quietly expectant the piano used to look when he sat down at it. Rush Street in Chicago on a misty night, the neon signs of all the night-clubs haloed, the taxi-horns muted in the gentle fog.

How many worlds away?

MacLean came in from chow, first out, fastest eater. He bent over Dooley, long eager nose.

"You better hide, kid. He's really pissed."

"Don't get excited, Mac. And don't do me any favors. Just go away."

"Just trying to help you, Kid."

"Yeah, I know."

And waited.

Dooley Carhart was a piano player from Chicago who'd been bouncing around Florida for a year, lightly tea-d up most of the time, drunk on gin and the climate. He played the piano in bars until he ran out of jobs, began to steal and wound up on the chain gang with two years to build.

The only law of the prison dormitory, he discovered immediately, was that of violence. Except for shakedowns and riots, no guards ever entered it. Authority was represented by a trusty, of whom it was said that he would get out with better than a thousand dollars.

On the first night, Dooley made up his bunk, an upper on the top tier, and flopped into it. The noise in the dormitory was deafening. Radios brayed, all different, voices shouted, sang, cursed.

The rack shook, and a brown face under wheat-yellow hair looked over the top.

"Mind if I come up?"

Dooley said no.

He swung himself over the top and perched on the side of the bunk, a half-naked brown giant, in faded gray prison pants.

"Barton's my name. You're the new-cock came in today."

"That's right. I'm Carhart."

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"What'd you bring?"

"Two years."

"This your first bit?"

"My first."

"You'll find it ain't so bad when you get used to it. You can build easy time or do it the hard way. I could make this standing on my head in the shit-jacket. All you got to do here is beat your brains out on the road, and they don't care what else you do."

"I ain't exactly looking forward to that road department."

"It'll be rough at first, but you'll get used to it. After a while, you'll learn how to goof so they can't see it—Hey I was on my way to get a coke. You wanna coke or something? Ya got cigarettes?"

Dooley said yes, and yes he had cigarettes.

When Barton returned with the cokes, he said,

"I've been thinking, there's a lower bunk vacant down in my rack. I don't know why the hell he put you up here. Ya gotta climb up and down every time you have to piss? That's nowhere. Let's move your gear over there, you wanna?"

Dooley wanted to be alone and read, but he thought of the hassle he was due to face out on the road in the morning. It would help to know somebody, and this guy acted like a wheel. If it was some kind of a pitch, he would just pull out.

"Good deal," he said, and they rolled everything up in the mattress and carried it down to the back end of the long room, through the inquiring stares of other prisoners.

"You sure this is all right? The house-man—"

"He don't mean anything. If he says anything, I'll straighten him out."

The bunk was on the bottom tier of a rack in the back corner of the dormitory, another bunk beside it. Hanging across the back of the rack was a blanket covered with pin-up pictures, and on a shelf across the head of the bunks were an overseas radio, some pipes, tobacco, shaving gear.

"This is fine, man," Dooley said, unrolling the mattress and distributing his belongings.

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"Beats sleeping up on a shelf. They call this the Mourner's Corner back here."

Dooley noticed for the first time that Barton was wearing shackles.

"What did you get those for?"

"Oh these? Runnin'." He stretched out on the bunk. The stout chain was about two feet long, fastened to thick steel rings around his ankles. "I ran about a month ago, but I got drunk and fouled up. They'll take 'em off maybe in a month or so. Hey I think I'll make some coffee."

He reached under the bunk and pulled out a glass half-gallon jar. "I'll get some water from the bathroom."

He brought the jar back half-full and put it on the shelf, then opened the back of the radio and drew out an electric cord with a plug on one end. "Shakedown all the time, but they never find this baby." The other end of the cord was an exposed wire wrapped around the handle of a spoon.

"This is what they call a bug. Put the spoon in the water, plug in, pretty soon hot water."

They drank the coffee out of glasses, and talked. Dooley learned that Barton had been in the Marines and got a DD for black-marketing in Manila during the war—that he was a light-heavy professional boxer when not in jail—that he had made time in Leavenworth and Raiford, the state pen—and that he wanted some day to return to Manila to stay.

Barton assured him that there was nothing to the road that couldn't be handled, and that anyway he'd be around to help him out.

Dooley went to sleep with an easier mind.

In the morning he was assigned to the bull gang, Barton's crew, under the boss-guard, Cap'n Tig.

Tig was a towering fat man with a whiskey-raddled face and bright malign squeezed-looking eyes.

He fastened on Dooley early in the day. Dooley was down in a ditch, wrestling with the unfamiliar shovel. Tig came sauntering along the line of digging men, holding an open lunch bucket in his hand and eating a pork chop. The crew worked silently as he stood watching Dooley.

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"What'd you bring, fella?"

"Two years, Cap'n."

"Hmmf. Where you from?"

"Chicago, sir."

"Yankee, eh? What'd you do outside?"

"Played the piano, sir."

"Played the piano. You mean for a living?"

"Yessir."

"Hmmf. Well, play me a tune on that ignorant stick you got there—" The crew laughed dutifully. "We'll show you how to—"

"Pardon me, Cap'n." Barton carried on his shoulder a long-handled wide-bladed bush knife. "I thought I'd go down and cut that bamboo thicket. It's going to hold us up when we get down there otherwise."

"Good idea. Take somebody along with you to drag them out of your way." He looked around.

"How about the new-cock, Cap'n? He'll have to learn how to use a bush-hook some time."

"Hmmf. O.K., take him with you."

"If he tries to run I'll cut his legs off, Cap'n."

"Go on, ramble, ramble."

They walked up the road towards the bamboos, Barton's shackles jingling in the morning quiet.

"Wonderful," Dooley said. "How do you get away with it?"

"I'm the ramrod of this crew, lad. And I don't get away with much. If we were on a heavy job, like putting in a culvert, I'd be working my ass off, me and Bayou Boy. On a chicken-shit job like this he lets me horse around, as long as I keep working. We'll go down here and goof a little."

"Man! That fat son of a bitch sure builds up a lot of pressure. I was waiting for my ears to pop."

"You might as well figure you're going to spend some time in the hole. After a while he'll get a new one to play with and forget about you. He's gotta have fresh meat."

They were at the bamboos. Barton brandished the long wicked bush-knife over his head, shouting:

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"Flash Barton in the Philipines! Take that and that and that!", attacking the bamboos with a wild joyous fury, toppling them like matches. "Die like a dog, Mr. Moto! Take that, and that!"

The guard leaned on his shotgun and grinned at Barton whirling and slashing and yelling in the bamboos, knife flashing in the sun.

Dooley had a good time. It felt good to laugh again, pulling the cut saplings across the road, in the warm misty sunlight of an early morning in Florida.

Noon chow was eaten under any convenient trees, where the con who did the cooking dug a fire-pit in the sand and heated a crock of lima beans with pieces of hog-back floating in it, like pieces of a football. They ate from tin plates, sitting on the ground.

Dooley finished eating and lay back in the thick flattened grass, smoking a cigarette. Bart was sleeping under a tree across the clearing, as were most of the crew. One of the cons walked over and sat down beside Dooley. A thin scrawny sinewy redhead with popping brown eyes. His face and body were burned brown, and he looked to Dooley like a rawhide thong. Or one of those long brown bugs with their eyes on stems.

"How ya makin' it?"

"Pretty good so far."

"You'll get used to it. Daddy Bart's sure takin' care of you."

"Barton? He's a fine guy."

"Didn't take you two long to get together. You know him in some other rock?"

Another con sat down, the massive body blocking Dooley off from the clearing. He curled a huge hand around Dooley's ankle, thrust forward the thick neck and cropped bullet-head. Bayou Boy.

"Hiya, baby, We gonna take a shower after lights out tonight?"

Dooley shook his head.

"What's the matter, afraid of Bart?"

"I like to sleep at night."

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"You ain't gettin' much sleep around Bart."

"If you mean he snores—"

"You know what I mean, punk." He got up. "I'll see you in the shower room an hour after lights out tonight. Don't lemme have to come and get you."

Boneyard got up too. "You better be there, punk. Just ask Barton what happened to Sweet Pea."

"Sweet Pea."

"Yeah, Sweet Pea."

Dooley was too busy staying ahead of Cap'n Tig for the rest of the day to think of anything else, but that night after chow as they lay listening to the radio he said,

"Who was Sweet Pea?"

"What do you know about Sweet Pea?"

"Nothing. I was told to ask you."

"Boneyard and Bayou Boy been giving you trouble?"

"Not trouble, really. They made me a little uneasy, but—"

"Uneasy, is it. Well, Sweet Pea was a young kid that was here a while back. Pink skin, long eyelashes, not very bright. He used to bunk right here, but he moved out and got those two on his tail. He said no, so they and some other guy took him back in the shower room and beat the shit out of him. He had to agree eventually, anyway—he could have saved himself a lot of grief—just not bright."

"What happened to him?"

"How should I know? They took him to the County Hospital from here."

"Wasn't there any investigation?"

"Oh, some chicken-shit questions. Nobody found out anything. He was just a punk and not a very good worker anyway. They probably turned him loose. He never came back."

He sat up in the bunk, lit a cigarette.

"As long as it came up—I wanted to take my time, but Boneyard kinda—I think we oughta get with it and build some easy time. Whaddya say?"

Dooley was silent.

"I'm not a very patient man."

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"Bart, I'd like to make use of all this dead time to get some reading done and learn something. It's the only way to pull out of this ahead. That's all I want to do, Bart."

"Look, lad. You saw today how I can help you, out on the road. I can also make it so goddam hot for you out there that you'll have to run, or try to run—and if you move out of here, you'll have Boneyard and Bayou Boy on your trail—a stork, and a bear. A great big-ass bear! Would you like that? Just relax—I'll tell you what, you can rub my back with mineral oil, that'll relax you. Here."

In the months of sadism and calculated brutality that followed, Dooley clung to the blind determination that he would somehow come out alive and ahead. There were periods when Barton was contrite and subdued and would express guarded curiosity about the books that Dooley read. And Dooley, eager to divert him, to fan the small spark, would read aloud to him, the lyric poems of Millay (which Barton grudgingly admitted he liked: "Really loused up wasn't she?"), the polished nonsense of Perelman, anything to lure him along the road of mental pursuits, to rouse the throttled humanity that must be somewhere in him.

From this, Barton would emerge silent, restless, morose—And arrange a series of crushing humiliations for Dooley, designed to show his contempt, reaffirm his dominance—inviting a crony on the crew to spend the night ("Eskimos do it all the time"), forcing him to paint his face with cosmetics and parading him around the dormitory. Dooley endured it with stony self-possession, sometimes even evincing apathetic enjoyment in a forlorn effort to deprive Barton of satisfaction.

In all this, a small thing helped to comfort and sustain him. Sitting on the edge of Barton's bunk, by the high barred window open to the soft tropic night, he could see, across the dark and silent land, a red winking signal light on a radio tower. Watching it night after night, he came to imagine himself a swimmer at sea, the distant winking light a light on the shore of safety. Barton would growl with impatience, and having to turn away from the winking light was like giving

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himself up to drowning. But there stayed in his mind the resolve that he would come to that shore safely.

Along about that time, Canfield arrived at the stockade. The plump languid airline pilot and forger was salvation to Dooley. Just to talk to someone, even a mannered exquisite, about books and plays and music, restored a little his shattered confidence and reassured him that his identity had not been totally lost.

Bart hated Canfield, and told him to stay away from the bunk—but Dooley had need of those yammering camps with the malicious one—the opportunity to pour malice on the head of the absent Bart, to hear the sardonic Canfield make wearily deprecatory remarks about him. It was a small source strength to Dooley, seeking strength from any source at all. And even then, during these furtive and frantic conversations, he could not escape a small twinge of shame and disloyalty.

Shortly after his arrival, Canfield sought the protection of Bo Braswell, a barrel-chested hooligan from Center Street in Macon.

"I know he's a little outré," he apologized to Dooley, "but the material for molding is there. I'll take him to the Coast and polish him up, make a vogue of him."

Dooley waited on the bunk, dreading Barton's return. Casting about in his mind for the attitude, the words that would confuse Bart, divert him, diminish his anger.

Canfield stopped and bent over Dooley.

"Are you just going to lie there and make like Camille?"

"I know what I'm doing. It's what he expects to see."

"Oh Jesus you make me sick. Of course it's what he expects. If you're going to hold still for another dreary degrading beating, I just—"

"Well, what should I do, what the goddam hell should I do?"

"Throw him a curve, for Christ's sake! If you can't snow that big dumb blond ox, you oughta quit the business. That guy has got you so utterly—Honestly, I give up!"

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He went wearily up the long aisle between the bunks.

When Bart came back from chow, Dooley was writing a letter.

He leaned against the rack indolently. "I hope you're making out your will."

"Just a letter. I'm writing to Fort Worth about those ankle-boots you wanted."

"I call that mighty sweet. But you can't buy me, Madam. And you can't slide out of what's coming to you, you two-faced—"

"Bart, I'll ask you again—let me go. Let's be sensible. I'll get a bunk by myself, and we'll forget all this argling and bargling."

"*Bart*, let me *go*!" he mimicked, falsetto. "Jesus. You don't even tell yourself the truth any more. Two weeks after you came to me, I couldn't have run you off with a baseball bat. You don't really want to go anywhere."

He came around the end of the bunk. "—But if you stay here, you're gonna improve."

He sat down on the bunk, watching Dooley, ominous brightness in his eyes. A long brown hand came to rest on Dooley's leg just above the knee. He gave a tentative squeeze, just tuning-up, and Dooley gave a small involuntary jump.

"Today, I found out you've got a mean little streak in you. I used to wonder what you and that California poppy talked about all the time—"

"Bart, if you'll listen—"

"I don't need any chicken-shit explanations—"

"Bart, you remember the night you made me paint my face and led me all over the barracks?"

"Yeah, you were chicken-shit then, too."

"I went through a lot of humiliation that night. Man, it went deep. And the night your friend Dago called here, panting like a spaniel. C'mon in, Dago, have a cigar."

"What humiliation? You're a punk, you're supposed to act like a punk. You ain't got any rights."

"I give up. I'll never find it. It's there, but I'll never find it."

"Whaddya talking about now?"

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"About you. I've thought about this a lot, Bart. Somewhere inside you there's a guy with a natural instinct for what's good, in music, poetry, books, different things. And he's unhappy and crowded in there, because there's two other guys living there too, a bank-robber and a fourflusher. If you could get the third man to move, there'd be more room and less argument and it might not be a bad place to live.

"I knew if I let you talk, you'd make me mad. On your feet, you wise son of a bitch.

"I'm not finished. I'd just as soon be hit for something as nothing."

"On your feet, before I—" Barton turned at the hand on his shoulder.

Canfield: "Bart, I want to tell you that it was all my—"

"I thought I told you to stay away from here, shit-bird."

"Dear boy, I just want to say that we're sorry for—"

"Blow, before I slap you loose from that phoney accent!"

"Just a minute, I'm not poor Dooley, you know. Don't you jump bad with me, you alligator-bait you—"

Barton leaped from the bunk and hit him a slashing backhand across the face that staggered him backwards. He hit the bars of the window with a jarring crash.

Uproar broke loose, all Canfield.

"He hit me, he hit me, the sonovabitch hit me! Help! Bo! Help! He broke my jaw! Bo! Help, Bo!"

Cons came running from all over the dormitory. The house-man went to the window and called down. "Hey, Cap'n! Up here, Cap'n!"

Bo elbowed his way swiftly through the crowd, grim and purposeful.

Canfield was still screaming.

"You broke my jaw, you dirty bastard!" He kicked viciously at Barton, who caught the leg and held it. Canfield danced around him on one leg, screaming bloody murder.

Bo broke through the crowd and launched himself at Barton, who threw Canfield on the bunk. The blow landed on Barton's neck, and he leaped at Bo, hitting him in the jaw and driving him back into the crowd. Bo came hurtling back

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and grabbed Barton around the waist, carrying him to the floor.

"All right, all right, break it up, break it up! What's goin' on here?"

Three guards with blackjacks came through the crowd. They pulled the struggling pair on the floor apart.

"A little time in the hole will cool you boys off. Come on, come on." The guards led them away. The cons, disappointed, went about their business.

Dooley, alone, lay back on the bunk blank-eyed, exhausted.

"Is this where I apply for a widow's pension?"

He looked up. Canfield stood there, holding a blanket and pillow.

"Can I sleep with you tonight? My father's out getting drunk and he beats me when he comes home. I brought my pajamas and some bananas. I know you're starved."

"Idiot. You'll bring down the wrath of the rabble on us."

"I don't think so. Wasn't Bo magnificent? How did you like my little production?" He got into Barton's bunk and lay down.

"Baby, baby, you took an awful chance."

"I left nothing to chance, sweetie. I got Bo half-ribbed-up over Bart before I came down here, and I gave the houseman three bucks to call the law whenever the fight started. Those people are so predictable, I love that in them."

"Poor Bo. Poor Bart."

"Oh my god. Listen with Bo in the hole for a while, I'm saving money. And don't think he did anything for *me*! He's been honing for Bart for a long time. I merely staged it."

"But when they come out—"

"They'll be buddies. Suffering brings people closer together."

"Canfield, you are positively—"

"Do I not know it. Didn't you like that first bit I did, 'He hit me, he hit me!'. Like a Birmingham housewife blowing the whistle on a colored masher."

"*Most* effective."

"And later, that line, 'He broke my jaw!' A fine touch."

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"Never better. Ethel. And they said you were through."

"The choreography could have been better, but I had to ad-lib."

"I thought it was fresh and inventive.—Of course you had to mention 'alligator' to Bart."

"Certainly. You can't ignite anything with wet matches. It's all chemical."

They fell silent at the approach of Bayou Boy, the big ramrod of the crew. He stood at the foot of the bunk, glowering.

"I suppose you know that on account of you two butterflahs, the crew'll be short the two best men tomorrow. I'll make it mah business to see you take their place. You'll roll tomorrow!" He turned and walked away.

Canfield sat up, peeling a banana.

"Thank goodness. I thought it was going to be something sticky."

"But tomorrow—what'll we do?"

"I'm tired tonight. We'll think about it tomorrow." He lay down.

There was a long silence in the bunk. Dooley stirred restlessly.

"Poor Bart. I'll bet he's miserable down there."

"Get him a nice alligator bag.—Goodnight, pet."

"Goodnight."

...And somewhere far off, he seemed to hear a taxi horn, half-muted in the gentle fog.

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THE BURDEN

(for L.S., poet)

Early and late,
Though turning grief
May twist at springing love or halfpast life,
Enchant the heart, the warden and the thief;
Render the dawn in steel and white
Till it surrender the bare sun,
The orange O that comes with heat
To spend on trees or too pale skin
Until all celebrate
Variety of color, shape, and fruit,
The mortal summer of both man and leaf
In full, prime state,
Early and late.

Smoke sinks the light
Across a roof
Where laundry droops and catches in relief
Deep thunderclouds and one emerging wife
Who shows her skill in gathering the tight
Strung sheets and then more sheets. And then goes down
Into her customary prison, her sure lot,
Till she can spread again over a line
Whatever needs the light
And issue of the sun. Sobeit
Strong or frail or weak or whole or long or brief,
Early or late,—
The grace of weight.

—ROGER HECHT

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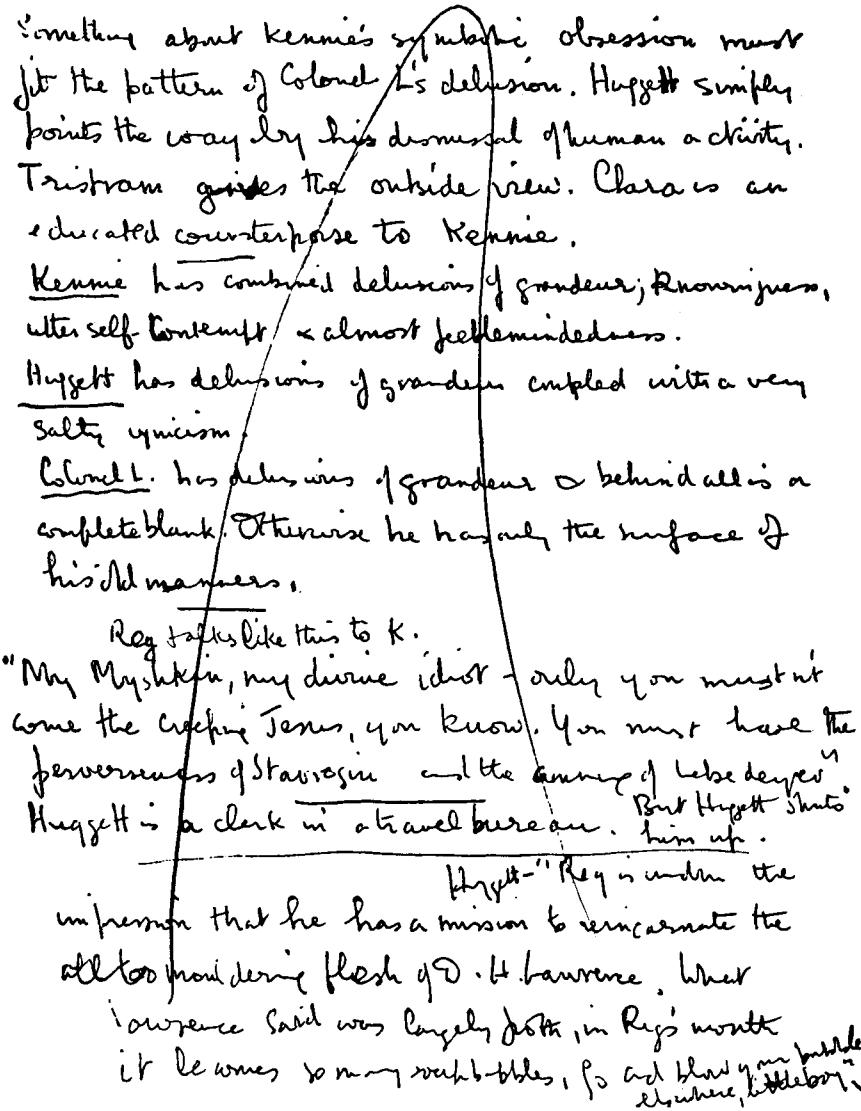
Something about Kennie's symbolic obsession must fit the pattern of Colonel L's delusion. Huggett simply points the way by his dismissal of human activity. Tristram guides the outside view. Clara is an educated counterpoise to Kennie.

Kennie has combined delusions of grandeur; Rhonmijness, utter self-contempt & almost feeblemindedness.

Huggett has delusions of grandeur coupled with a very salty cynicism.

Colonel L. has delusions of grandeur & behind all is a complete blank. Otherwise he has only the surface of his old manners.

Reg talks like this to K.

"My Myshkin, my divine idiot - only you mustn't come the Creeping Jesus, you know. You must have the perverseness of Stavrogin and the cunning of Lebedeyev."

Huggett is a clerk in a travel bureau. But Huggett shuts him up.

Huggett - "Reg is under the impression that he has a mission to reincarnate the all too prevailing flesh of D. H. Lawrence. What Lawrence said was largely bosh, in Reg's mouth it becomes so many soapbubbles. Go and blow your bubbles elsewhere, kiddeboy."

A page taken from Angus Wilson's notes for A Bit Off the Map, *the title story of his new collection of short stories. The names mentioned are all those of characters in the story. The line scrawled across the page is Wilson's way of indicating that the notes on the page have been used.*

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Sketch by Rosalie Seidler

THE ART OF FICTION XX

ANGUS WILSON

SCENE: Mr Wilson's London apartment in Dolphin Square, just downriver from Chelsea. Dolphin Square—and this came as something of a surprise—is a huge block of service apartments, with restaurant (where we ate lunch), indoor swimming-pool, shops, bars, etc.—the layout and décor of this part strongly reminiscent of an ocean liner. The apartment itself, on the ground floor and looking out onto the central court, was small, comfortable, tidy, uneccentric; there were books but not great heaps of them; the pictures included a pair of patriotic prints from the First World War ("the period fascinates me"). For Mr. Wilson it is just a place to stay when he has to be in London: his real home is a cottage in Suffolk, five miles from the nearest village ("I find I hate cities more and more. I used to need people, but now I can

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be much more alone"). The electric fire was on, although the late September day was fine and quite mild: Mr. Wilson explained that he had just got back from Asia—Japan (where he had been a guest of honour at the P.E.N. Conference), the Phillipines, Cambodia, Thailand—and found England cold.

Although one does not think of Mr. Wilson as a small man, he is rather below the average height. His face is mobile but somewhat plumper than in most of the published photographs, the hair white at the front shading to grey at the back, the forehead lined, the eyebrows rather prominent, the eyes pale grey and serious. But not solemn: Mr. Wilson's manner has a liveliness and warmth that is immediately engaging. He talks quickly, confidently yet unaffectedly, eagerly—obviously enjoying it. The conversation before and during lunch was mainly about Japan—it had been his first visit to Asia and he had clearly been greatly impressed—and about other writers. After lunch Mr. Wilson agreed to talk about himself.

* * *

INTERVIEWER

When did you start writing?

WILSON

I never wrote anything—except for the school magazine—until November 1946. Then I wrote a short story one weekend—*Raspberry Jam*—and followed that up by writing a short story every weekend for 12 weeks. I was then 33. My writing started as a hobby: that seems a funny word to use—but, yes, hobby. During the War when I was working at the Foreign Office I had a bad nervous breakdown, and after the War I decided that simply to return to my job at the British Museum would be too depressing. Writing seemed a good way of diversifying my time. I was living in the country and commuting to London then and I could only do it at weekends. That's why I started with short stories: this was something I could finish, realize completely, in a weekend.

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INTERVIEWER

Had you never thought of becoming a writer before that time?

WILSON

No, I never had any intention of becoming a writer. I'd always thought that far too many things were written, and working in the Museum convinced me of it. But I showed some of my stories to Robin Ironside, the painter, and he asked if he could show them to Cyril Connolly, who took two for *Horizon*. Then a friend of mine at Secker and Warburg said, "Let us have a look at them," and they said that if I gave them 12 stories they would publish them. This was *The Wrong Set*. They told me there wasn't much sale for short stories and so on, but the book was surprisingly successful both here and in America. After that I went on writing—reviews, broadcasts, more short stories. The thing grew and grew, and when I came to write *Hemlock and After* I had to do it in one of my leaves. I did it in 4 weeks. But when I wanted to write a play—that was a different matter. I knew it would take longer to write and that I'd have to revise it, attend rehearsals, and so on. And I was still a full-time civil servant at the British Museum. To resolve the conflict I resigned. It was rather ironic really. When I left school I wanted a permanent job, and I got it at the Museum. Now at the age of 42 I no longer wanted a permanent job. It meant giving up my pension, and that isn't easy at that age. But so far I haven't regretted it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find writing comes easily to you?

WILSON

Yes. I write very easily. I told you *Hemlock* took 4 weeks. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* took 4 months—and an awful lot of that time was taken up just with thinking. The play—*The Mulberry Bush*—the only thing I've rewritten several times—was different again. My latest book of short stories, *A Bit off the Map*, took longer too, and my new novel is proving a bit

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difficult. But I'm not unduly worried. When one starts writing it's natural for the stuff to come rolling off the stocks—is that the right image?—rather easily. And, of course, the fact that it comes harder doesn't necessarily mean that it's worse. When Dickens published his novels in serial form he always added in his letter to the reader: "I send you this labour of love". But when it came to *Bleak House* he couldn't—it hadn't been a labour of love. But the later Dickens novels are certainly none the worse for that.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work every day?

WILSON

Goodness, no. I did that when I was a civil servant and I don't propose to do so now. But when I'm writing a book I do work every day.

INTERVIEWER

To a schedule?

WILSON

Not really. No. I usually work from 8 to 2, but if it's going well I may go on to 4. Only if I do I'm extremely exhausted. In fact, when the book is going well the only thing that stops me is sheer exhaustion. I wouldn't like to do what Elizabeth Bowen once told me she did—write *something* every day, whether I was working on a book or not.

INTERVIEWER

Do you usually work on one book at a time?

WILSON

Oh yes. I've never worked on more than one book at a time, and I don't think it would be good.

INTERVIEWER

About how many words a day do you write?

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WILSON

Oh—between one and two thousand. Sometimes more. But the average would be one to two thousand.

INTERVIEWER

Longhand, typewriter or dictation?

WILSON

Longhand. I can't type. And I'm sure it wouldn't work for me to dictate. Though I did think of it when I was doing the play: it might help with the dialogue. But the trouble is I'm too histrionic a person anyway, and even when I'm writing a novel I act out the scenes.

INTERVIEWER

Aloud?

WILSON

Very often. Especially dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

Do you make notes?

WILSON

Books of them. The gestatory period before I start to write is very important to me. That's when I'm persuading myself of the truth of what I want to say, and I don't think I could persuade my readers unless I'd persuaded myself first.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of notes?

WILSON

Oh, notes about the ages of the characters, where they live, little maps, facts about their lives before the book starts. Names are very important to me, too. Look at these notes for *The Mulberry Bush*, for example. There are statements of themes, like this: "James and Rose are the core of the tradition". And questions—I'm always asking myself questions—

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like: "What are Kurt's motives here?" I set myself problems and try to find ways out of them. Then the thing begins to take shape—this note, for example: "The first act ends in row between Ann and Simon." Then comes the first version of the first act. It's the same with the novels: I write notes like: "But this isn't what the book is really about. What it *is* about is...", and so on.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you feel the need for so many notes?

WILSON

Two reasons. To convince myself, as I said before. And to keep a kind of check on myself. Once one starts writing the histrionic gifts—the divine passion or whatnot—are liable to take control and sweep you away. It's a matter of setting things on their right course. Then it's much easier to write as the spirit moves.

INTERVIEWER

Do you do careful or rapid first drafts?

WILSON

Oh, I only do one draft. I never do any other. I correct as I go along. And there is very little correction: the changes in the draft are mainly deletions. Occasionally a new paragraph goes in. Take the end of *Hemlock*, for example. It's rather a Dickens ending, accounting for all the characters. At the end I found Ron's mother, Mrs. Wrigley, wasn't accounted for, so I put in the paragraph about her. It's rather like Dickens at the end of *Dombey and Son*. After he'd sent the manuscript to his publishers he sent them a note: "Please put in a paragraph about Diogenes the dog: something on these lines..." I like to have everyone accounted for, too.

INTERVIEWER

What is the difference for you between a short story and a novel?

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WILSON

Short stories and plays go together in my mind. You take a point in time and develop it from there: there is no room for development backwards. In a novel I also take a point in time but feel every room for development backwards. All fiction for me is a kind of magic and trickery—a confidence-trick, trying to make people believe something is true that isn't. And the novelist, in particular, is trying to convince the reader that he is seeing society as a whole.

This is why I use such a lot of minor characters and sub-plots, of course. It isn't wilful love of sub-plots for their own sake, wilful Victorianism, but because they enable me to suggest the existence of a wider society, the ripples of a society outside. And more important is this thing about fiction as trickery. The natural habit of any good and critical reader is to disbelieve what you are telling him and try to escape out of the the world you are picturing. Some novelists try to make the magic work by taking you deep down inside one person. I try to multiply the worlds I put into the book—so that, like the ripples of the stone thrown into the brook, you feel the repercussions going further and further out. And at the same time bringing more in. The reader is more inclined to believe in Gerald and Ingeborg because someone so different as Mrs Salad is affected by them. I've always thought this had something to do with the endings of Shakespeare's tragedies. An entirely new lot of people come in—Fortinbras in *Hamlet*, for example, and it's the same with *Macbeth* and *Lear*. You believe in the tragedies more because these others from outside confirm them. The worst kind of nightmare is the one where you dream you've woken up and it's still going on. The third reason for all the characters is the Proustian one, which seems to me very good, that the strangest and most unlikely lives are in fact interdependent. This is especially true in times like our own when the old boundaries and demarcations are becoming blurred.

INTERVIEWER

What about short stories...?

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WILSON

You can't do this sort of thing with short stories. They have a kind of immediate ethical text. Many of mine have punning titles. I take a platitude—"the wrong set", for example: the point is that no one knows what the wrong set is, and one person's wrong set is another's right set. And you get the pay-off, which is something I like. A play is rather like this but has more depth. And plays and short stories are similar in that both start when all but the action has finished.

INTERVIEWER

You've seen what Frank O'Connor said about *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* when he was interviewed for this series.* He criticizes your "exploitation of every known form of technique in the modern novel"—techniques taken, he says, from the cinema and from *Point Counterpoint*—and the whole modern tendency to concentrate the action of a novel around the actual moment of crisis instead of covering a longer period and "demonstrating the hero in all his phases". *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, he says, "would have been a good novel if it had begun twenty years earlier." I'm sure you will have something to say to this.

WILSON

Yes, indeed. I thought his remarks very curious. He implies that I'm in the twentieth century experimental tradition. It's very flattering, of course—"every known form of technique in the modern novel"—but I wasn't aware of using any techniques, except that the book was concerned with echoes of memory. I think the reader should be unaware of techniques, though it's the critic's job to see them, of course. O'Connor seems not to have noticed that the techniques used in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* are not just flashbacks as in the cinema nor just episodic as in *Point Counterpoint*—I've recently re-read that and can see no shape in it at all. If you examine the flashbacks in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*—and they took me a lot of trouble, I may say—you'll see that it is an ironic picking up of phrases. Marie Hélène says: "Life consists, I believe, in accep-

* *See pages 43–65 of this issue.*

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ting one's duty, and that means often to accept the second best." This leads Gerald to remember his courtship of Ingeborg: he accepted the second-best then and it has ruined both his life and her's. This is an ironic comment on the cynical realism of Marie Hélène. It's not just cinema, you see, it's very carefully planned, though I say it myself.

INTERVIEWER

What about O'Connor's remark that it should have started 20 years earlier?

WILSON

If it had started 20 years earlier it would have been a simply enormous book—a kind of chronicle-novel, I suppose: *The Story of a Disappointed Man.* Where O'Connor goes wrong is in thinking that I'm concerned at all with the hero as such. I'm only concerned with the hero as an illustration of the inevitability of decline if life is denied. After all, there's a definite statement in the book: Gerald's life goes wrong in two ways—with the historical fraud, and with his wife and children. And when he tries to "face the truth"—in the conventional phrase—he can do this in relation to the fraud all right, but he can't remake his life with his wife and children. This shows up the platitude of "facing the truth". Gerald is only freed in that he faces the *result* of his *not* facing the truth —he accepts his loneliness. A matter of theoretical morality can be put right, but this can't be done where human beings are involved.

INTERVIEWER

Other people besides O'Connor have commented on certain technical similarities between your work and Huxley's. I gather you don't feel you owe him any particular debt?

WILSON

Consciously, of course, I'm in great reaction against Huxley —and against Virginia Woolf. But I read them a great deal when young, and what you read in adolescence can go very

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deep. I've been much more influenced by Dickens, Proust, Zola. And the ceremony in *Hemlock* is obviously influenced by that scene in *The Possessed* where the poet, who is Turgenev, comes in and makes a fool of himself. Zola has certainly influenced me a great deal in the form and shape of my novels. From Proust I get the feeling about paradox and the truth of improbability—especially the latter.

INTERVIEWER

Are your characters based on observation?

WILSON

Oh yes. I don't see how else you can do it. But not taken from life. Every character is a mixture of people you've known. Characters come to me—and I think this is behind the Madeleine business in Proust—when people are talking to me. I feel I have heard this, this tone of voice, in other circumstances. And, at the risk of seeming rude, I have to hold on to this and chase it back until it clicks with someone I've met before. The second secretary at the embassy in Bangkok may remind me of the chemistry assistant at Oxford. And I ask myself, what have they in common? Out of such mixtures I can create characters. All my life I've always known a lot of people. Some say my novels are narrow, but I really can't see what they mean. I thought they were pretty wide myself.

INTERVIEWER

Some people think you have an unnecessarily large number of vicious characters.

WILSON

I really don't know why people find my characters unpleasant. I believe—perhaps it would be different if I were religious—that life is very difficult for most people and that most people make a fair job of it. The opportunities for heroism are limited in this kind of world: the most people can do is sometimes not to be as weak as they've been at other times. When Evelyn Waugh reviewed *Hemlock and After* he

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was very percipient about techniques but described the characters as "young cad", "mother's darling", and so on—terms it would never occur to me to use. I told him I thought the people he described in those terms had behaved rather well. Terence—the "young cad"—is on the make, certainly, but he behaves rather well in spite of that. And Eric does half break away from his mother—which is quite an achievement in the circumstances.

Of course, all my characters are very self-conscious, aware of what they are doing and what they are like. There's heroism in going on at all while knowing how we are made. Simple, naive people I'm impatient of, because they haven't faced up to the main responsibility of civilised man—that of facing up to what he is and to the Freudian motivations of his actions. Most of my characters have a Calvinist conscience, and this is something which in itself makes action difficult. The heroism of my people, again, is in their success in making a relationship with other human beings, in a humanistic way, and their willingness to accept some sort of pleasure principle in life as against the gnawings of a Calvinist conscience and the awareness of Freudian motivations. These people are fully self-conscious, and the only ones who are at all evil—apart from Mrs. Curry, who is something quite different, a kind of embodiment of evil—are those like Marie Hélène and Ingeborg who substitute for self-awareness and self-criticism a simple way of living, Marie Hélène's hard and practical, Ingeborg's soft and cosy. They accept a *pattern* of behaviour and morality instead of self-awareness. Characters can be heroic even though they can squeeze only a minimum of action out of the situation. That is how I see it, anyway, though I realize some people might find my characters rather inactive.

INTERVIEWER

I noticed earlier that you sometimes seem to speak of your characters as existing outside the novel—the kind of thing the Leavises so object to. And Elizabeth Sands makes a brief appearance in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*.

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WILSON

Yes, my friends have criticised my putting Elizabeth Sands in there—"Hugh Walpole," they say. I told E. M. Forster this and he said, "Ah yes—but Balzac too, you know." I'm on Leavis's side really, but he always writes as a critic, never as a creator. And the writer can't visualise his characters within a framework, although the creation of a work of art demands putting them within a framework. The use of a character for artistic creation is one thing; the author's knowledge of that character is another. Otherwise you'd remove the element of choice which is the essence of the creative act. What if George Eliot had seen *Middlemarch* whole, in a lump? There'd be no choice. At some point she must have imagined what Mr. Casaubon's housekeeper was like and decided to leave her out. It's not instantaneous vision, and I don't think Leavis himself would expect it to be. Of course it was self-indulgence to bring Elizabeth Sands into *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*: I felt that many people would like *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* better than *Hemlock and After*—and for the wrong reasons—and I wanted to show them that the worlds of the two books were the same.

INTERVIEWER

You think *Hemlock and After* has been underrated?

WILSON

Yes. I think that in the long run *Hemlock and After* is a better book than *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, if not so competently carried out. *Hemlock* is both a more violent and a more compassionate book. I know this is a sentimental cliché, but I do feel towards my books very much as a parent must towards his children. As soon as someone says: "I *did* like your short stories, but I don't like your novels" or "Of course you only really came into your own with *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*"—then immediately I want to defend all my other books. I feel this especially about *Hemlock and After* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* —one child a bit odd but exciting, the other competent but not really so interesting. If people say they like one book and

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not the other then I feel they can't have understood the one they don't like.

INTERVIEWER

The publisher's blurb for your new volume of short stories, *A Bit off the Map*, begins: "In an England where the lines of class and caste are becoming blurred and the traditional values have lost much of their force, the characters in Angus Wilson's new stories seek—sometimes cheerfully, sometimes with desperation—to get their true bearings on the map of society." Wouldn't this comment apply pretty much to all your books?

WILSON

Yes, I suppose it would. But you'll realise when they appear that each of these stories is designed to show a specific example of such blurrings of the class lines and of the false answers people provide today to get back some sense of position in society. These new stories are all satirical of the old philosophies which have now become fashionable again—neo-Toryism, Colin Wilson's Nietzscheanism, and so on—of people seeking after values which now no longer apply.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think of yourself primarily as a satirist?

WILSON

No, I don't. Satire for me is something more abstract—*Animal Farm*, *Erewhon*, that sort of thing. I'm much more traditional than that—which is why I was so surprised at Frank O'Connor's putting me with the experimental writers: I've deliberately tried to get back to the Dickens tradition. I use irony as one main approach—perhaps overdoing it. It's been said that too much irony is one of the great dangers of the English tradition, and perhaps I've fallen into that trap. I don't think of *Point Counterpoint* as satire: it's comedy of manners—and you could call my work that. But satire implies an abstract philosophy that I don't have—there's nothing I want to say in the way that Butler wanted to say something about machines, for example.

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INTERVIEWER

In writing about Anglo-Saxon attitudes, then, you aren't seeking to change them?

WILSON

Oh no. I don't think it's the novelist's job to give answers. He's only concerned with exposing the human situation, and if his books do good incidentally that's all well and good. It's rather like sermons.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't a sermon intended to do good?

WILSON

Only to the individual, not to society. It's designed to touch the heart—and I hope my books touch the heart now and again.

INTERVIEWER

But you definitely don't think a novelist should have a social purpose?

WILSON

I don't think a writer *should* have anything. I have certain social and political views, and I suppose these may appear in my work. But as a novelist I'm concerned solely with what I've discovered about human emotions. I attack not specific things but only people who are set in one way of thinking. The people in my books who come out well may well be more foolish, but they have retained an immediacy towards life, not a set of rules applied to life in advance.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think, then, of the "angry young men"?

WILSON

Of course they don't really belong together—though it's largely their own fault that they have been lumped together.

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They thought popular journalism was a good way to propogate their ideas, and the popular journalists themselves have naturally written of them as a group. The only thing I have against them—while knowing and liking them personally—is the element of strong self-pity, which I do think is a very ruinous element in art. Whatever they write about—when Osborne writes about his feeling for the underprivileged, for example—you get the feeling that they are really complaining about the way *they* have been treated. And—apart from Colin Wilson—they are so concerned to say that they won't be taken in—we'll be honest and not lay claim to any higher feelings than those we're quite sure we have—that one sometimes wishes they'd be a bit more hypocritical. After all, if you think of yourself in that way you come to think of everyone else in that way and reduce everything to the level of a commercial traveller talking in a bar, knowing life only too well—and in fact people are often better than they make themselves out to be. Their point of view is Iago's, and Iago disguised a very black heart—I don't accuse the angry young men of being black-hearted, of course—beneath his guise of a cynical plain man's point of view. It isn't quite good enough for serious artists.

INTERVIEWER

You mention John Osborne—I believe *The Mulberry Bush* was in the repertory of the Royal Court Theatre at the same time as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. What do you feel about writing for the stage? Do you feel the novelist has anything to learn from it?

WILSON

Yes. One learns a great deal about what can be omitted, even from a novel. Because the play is such a compact form. The best modern plays—by Tennessee Williams, John Osborne, and so on—have tremendous and wonderful power. But the play of ideas—Ibsen and so on——is a little too much at a discount these days.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you intend to write for the stage again?

WILSON

Certainly. I want to try to produce more purely theatrical emotion. And I hope to do that and still try for the ideas and the wit of dialogue that I think I got in *The Mulberry Bush*, which seemed a little untheatrical to some people. I want to get more theatrical power, not to write like Williams but to bring back something of the Ibsen and Shaw tradition.

INTERVIEWER

What about the cinema?

WILSON

I should be only too pleased if my books were turned into films, but I can't imagine myself writing original film scripts —I don't know the necessary techniques, and I rarely even go to the cinema these days. When writing a play you have to realise that the final production won't be only your own work. You have to co-operate with the producer, the actors, and so on. And I'm prepared for that. But in the cinema the writer is quite anonymous, and I feel—for good reasons or bad—that I must be responsible for what I've written and collect the praise or blame for it. Once a book is done I don't care what other people do with it. *The Mulberry Bush* is being televised soon, and the producer rang me up to say it would have to be cut to 90 minutes. I told him to go ahead and do what he wanted: he knows television and I don't. But I couldn't have made a sketch of *The Mulberry Bush* and let it be played about with, if you see the difference.

INTERVIEWER

What plans do you have for the future?

WILSON

I'm in the course of writing another novel. And, as I've just said, I want to do another play. Then I want to do a book of

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literary essays on nineteenth century writers, about whom I have a lot to say that I think hasn't been said. And I want to do a book—not fiction—about the Home Front during the 1914 War. Of all the terrible things that have happened in my lifetime I still think of the trench warfare of the 1914 War as the worst. And the Home Front was in the strange position of being concerned and yet unconcerned at the same time. The predicament of these people seems likely to connect closely with the predicament of many of the character in my novels: Bernard Sands and Gerald Middleton, for example, are both concerned with tragedy yet become observers of it by their withdrawal.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say something more about your new novel?

WILSON

I'm sorry, but I don't like to talk about my books in advance. It isn't just that any short account of a novel seems ridiculous by the side of the real thing. But, as I've said before, I think fiction-writing is a kind of magic, and I don't care to talk about a novel I'm doing because if I communicate the magic spell, even in an abbreviated form, it loses its force for me. And so many people have talked out to me books they would otherwise have written: once you have talked the act of communication has been made.

—MICHAEL MILLGATE

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Robert Winthrop White

FOUR STUDIES FOR SCULPTURE

No listing of his teachers or of artists he admires will provide much insight into the work of Robert Winthrop White. Rather than influences in concept, composition, or line his work reflects a neo-classic tradition upheld, and in part founded, by his grandfather, Stanford White, the architect, and his father, Lawrence Grant White, architect and translator of Dante.

As a beginning sculptor following the second World War his subjects were often spindly forms, agonized in appearance. By the early fifties they had become romantic: powerful plunging horses and proud bulls. Now the romanticism has resolved into a lyricism, and the early sparseness into a purity of line. At thirty-five he appears to be a fully mature artist. The drawings reproduced here are preliminary studies for two life-sized figures, The Ploughman *and* The Bather, *which were exhibited this autumn at the Davis Galleries in New York.*

He lives with his wife and three children—Sebastian, Stephanie, and Christian—in Saint James, Long Island, quite apart from any school of art or group of artists. He is quietly convinced of his own vision and is by temperament an individualist. The late Carl Milles wrote of him, "To me he is the hope for monumental sculpture in the United States."

—B.F.

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AFTER THE FUNERAL

Our mittened hands upon the snow-capped stone,
we stood and watched what once was river zag
a black and crazy trickle through the ice.
The bridge was not enough to heal the gap
that severs brothers' hands. Our minds were one.
Her patience was a hopeless miracle.
Boxed in a narrowness she always feared,
and housed in solid cold she was too thin
to stand, she took it kindly, like herself,
who all that day had not been like herself.
The music could have pleased her; even more
these named, familiar trees, this cobbled stream
that from her youth had memorized her face.

Defined and dared, she seemed to stand again
between us, almost touching, leaning down,
her chin cupped in her hands, her eyes upon
the nighthawks tracking the falling light, and glad,
its show of protest through, the purple sun
would drop into the stream and make it warm.

My brother sent her home: "It's almost dark,"
and turning, brushed his arm against my side.
The snow squealed under foot as if in pain.
The trees looked black, the bridge half-shadowy,
but we were not deceived—the bridge was stone.

—PAUL PETRIE

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HUGHES RUDD

A BANKRUPT

CERTAINLY he was the vainest man I've ever known: if he had lived I'm sure he would have made many people unhappy but somehow, from the very first, I felt he wouldn't live. Or so it seems now. At the time I probably didn't think about it one way or the other, since I wanted to live myself and that took up most of your time, just thinking about it.

But this vanity of his: it really was inexplicable. His face was that of a petty thief: you could hardly remember it for five minutes. His uniform was always sloppy, his stomach bulging over his belt, the belt buckle dull, his leggings not laced tightly enough. The seat of his fatigues bagged, his overseas cap kept the manufacturer's wrinkle and his shoes were rarely shined. And yet, one of his little sidelines was a business he carried on with the post cleaning and tailoring shop as a commission man. The uniforms never fitted, of course, and to get them fixed you took them to Liebknecht. He could also bring back from town brass insignia and belt buckles for those who couldn't leave the post for some reason or other, and, since soldiers take delight in these little things, the only means they have of dressing themselves up, Liebknecht did a fat business in crossed cannons, U.S. buttons, battalion insignia and garrison caps with stiff wire grommets in them. The brass objects were always plated: the brass wore off under the Blitz cloth, and the recruits were told that garrison caps were not permitted in armored units, but Liebknecht had his profit. The brass cannon and buttons were thrown away when the tin showed through, and the garrison caps went into barracks bags, to be worn on furloughs which never came. I think Liebknecht even sold Air Force wings to

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some soldiers for furlough use: an armored artillery battalion did not seem very glamorous at home.

Liebknecht's commercial success fed his vanity, no doubt: his appearance could not have sustained it. He bragged and boasted of how much he made, talking rapidly in a slum accent, overriding everyone who tried to interrupt, turning his head from one to another of us, his eyes flat and lifeless no matter how excited his voice became.

"Why be a sucker?" he would say, sitting on somebody's cot, leaning forward, talking above the noise of the small-time latrine crap game. "I ain't going to be in this army all my life, am I?"

We did not know. We could not answer him, and after waiting for his answer he would grin and snort, massaging his rubbery, boneless nose with the back of his pudgy hand.

"I had an uncle in the last war," he would say, until somehow we conceived a terrible idea of the last war, of hordes of Liebknechts in mustard-brown stiff uniforms, swarming over the battlefields in search of trades, of profits, of little sidelines on the banks of the Marne. "He was a Marine," Liebknecht would say, and we would think of Chateau Thierry and the Marines swarming and trading and grinning there, Liebknechts all, although we knew his uncle had never left the States. It was something the Liebknechts were proud of, our Liebknecht told us: "He cleaned up," he said. "He made thirty g's in a crap game lasted four days. In Brooklyn navy yard," and our Liebknecht would curse because he was in Oklahoma.

Well, we did not know. We were not sure. We took our tailoring to Liebknecht and watched his profits grow. If you did not give him your business you had to carry your clothes clear into town on the bus, and you might not get back for a month to pick them up. Or you might never get back: we could go overseas at any time, they said. Besides, Liebknecht was a friend of the first sergeant: it did not pay to ignore a friend of the first sergeant. When we got overseas, of course, it would be a different matter: at least twelve men had sworn to kill the sergeant on the first dark night abroad, and two

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hard cases made knives from files in the motor pool shop for that very purpose.

Nobody said so, but the implication was that once overseas we would do with our tailoring as we wished. Actually, as with Liebknecht himself, it was something we were not sure about: we did not know if one worried about tailoring and cleaning and pressing overseas, but we had a vague premonition about it: we wanted no specific information. We knew in our hearts it was a terrible thing to be burdened like that with the thought of clothes, to have them forever on our minds, but there it was, nothing to be done about it. We were well trained, after all. We were not stupid, exactly: we knew some of us were certainly going to die but there was a terrible gap in our knowledge: we did not know which were going to die and which were not, and so we all had to keep on worrying about such things as our clothes. We wanted to look nice, I guess: we were extremely well trained.

The great day came at last, of course: encumbered and cluttered and weighted until our knees trembled with the stiff equipment of war, we boarded a troop train: for New York, Liebknecht said. We carried packs of blankets rolled in canvas tent halves, shovels, picks, rifles, pistols, submachine guns, barracks bags; intricate patterns of webbed belts crossed and crisscrossed our bodies until we could hardly move and we peered out, frightened and stunned, from under the unaccustomed weight of steel helmets. Liebknecht boarded the train too, his sole equipment a clipboard which he carried in his hand: his gear was already in the kitchen car, he said. He seemed to check off names from a list, and when darkness came he went up and down the aisles selling nickel candy bars for twenty-five cents. We bought them eagerly, because we were leaving the known for the unknown, I suppose: there was no liquor and so the candy helped. Well, now, we thought, this is the way you begin to die, maybe, and we sat under the blue lights of the wartime trooptrain, eating candy bars and trying to accustom ourselves to this enormous commonplace. It wasn't easy, and before the trip was over Liebknecht sold out his stock.

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I remember two things about that night very clearly: a crap game started in the vestibule of our car and when I passed it on my way to the toilet I noticed one of the players had a roll of green toilet paper behind him and was tearing off sheets of it and covering the bets of the others: he was safe under the blue lights except when we passed a station or when somebody like me came by with a flashlight. The other thing I remember was Liebknecht, swaying with the rapid motion of the train going through the night, murmuring as he stopped at each seat: "Any you guys want candy bars?" and he would shake the box, rattling the candy bars in their stiff wrappers. We ate too many and suffered from thirst, because the water coolers broke down as soon as the train started.

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In the embarkation camp on the banks of the Hudson Liebknecht sold whiskey. It was improbable, even impossible, but he had it, at ten dollars a pint, and he started telling us he was sending his money home to his mother. Well, we did not know. We were getting very close to salt water and we did not care whether he had a mother or not. Maybe he said he was sending the money to his "old lady". That could have meant anything, but if Liebknecht had had a mother he would have called her his "old lady". We bought his whiskey during the three nights we stayed in that place, and on the last night a fight started in the latrine of "B" battery's barracks over the question of whether we were going to Hawaii or Iceland.

Liebknecht knew, of course: it was Africa. He threw away the suit of gas-proofed long underwear we were issued that last night and bragged about it later, laughing at us. He was right: the underwear was stiff and clogged with a greasy material which was supposed to keep the gas from burning you, and it rubbed off on everything in our barracks bags. Not only that, but they made us turn it in in Africa. We weren't supposed to have it at all, apparently.

We did not see Liebknecht when we boarded the train for the trip to the ship. We staggered, more heavily laden than before by new issues of equipment, and spent a humiliating hour standing in a railway station next to the bay, waiting for a ferry. An Italian boy in my section wet his pants, and when we heard the sergeant's whistle 'way up ahead we all started to run, as though there was a chance we might be left behind.

At the ship's gangway stood Liebknecht, submissively and unobtrusively to one side, out of the way of the officers, but standing there with his clipboard in one hand and a cup of Red Cross coffee in the other. The Red Cross ladies were smiling and poking paper cups at us but we were carrying so many objects we could not accept, of course: the Italian boy could not even get a hand free to sling his gas mask carrier around so it would cover his disgrace, but the Red Cross ladies pretended not to notice. They were used to that kind of thing, I guess. As I remember, they all had faintly blue gray hair.

The ship seemed as solid as the land: she swallowed us as

–Drawing by George Thompson

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calmly and insultingly as though an affair of this magnitude happened every day. The ship was bored: the crew was bored, the naval officers were terribly bored. They could not stand cattle, obviously: they handed out our life belts with a disdain which almost amounted to treason and implacably ordered us below.

The word went out at once that the ship was monstrously, insanely overloaded: someone heard our officers arguing about it with the ship's captain. The navy said it had been told to expect a certain number of men: instead of that, three times that many were now aboard. In the dim, bad air of the hold, we looked at each other: the steel walls were sweating, the sea rose on all sides, it was dark and hot and equipment was strewn over every inch of deck space: the Red Cross ladies seemed a thousand miles away, instead of twenty feet, and we felt trapped in a mine shaft, watching dumbly as the shaft was sealed up overhead. We were not exactly guilty of anything, we thought: our defencelessness only made it appear that way. There was no mistaking it now: somehow, we had been careless, we had given up a part of ourselves to irresponsible persons who were now claiming the whole, we had kept on laughing just a bit too long. And into this scene walked Liebknecht, with some news: his cousin was the ship's storekeeper. We looked at him standing in the little shaft of light which came down the stairs, and the ship sailed.

A third of the men were seasick before we passed Staten Island; the toilets overflowed at Ambrose Light, to remain out of order for fifteen days; the wash water was salt and so would not lather our soap, although we had to shave every day; we slept and ate in three shifts, so that breakfast for some fell at four in the afternoon, for others at midnight, with lunch at six in the morning; the officers feared we would throw away our overcoats when we learned we were going to Africa, and so required us to carry them with us all day long in the summer weather and to toil downward into the depths of the ship with them, wearing them in the chow lines where steam swathed us from the stoves and men fainted, vomiting from the heat, and after ten days of cloudless

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weather we were ordered to bring all our equipment up from the holds and spread it on deck for inspection, whereupon a storm hurried over the horizon and soaked our belongings, while we were below making a clean sweepdown fore and aft. It was hilarious and it was hell, and Liebknecht bunked with his cousin among the pampered crew. He began to sell us salt water soap and good razor blades and cigarettes, instead of the cheap issue variety; his candy bar stock was wonderfully replenished and now each bar was worth a dollar. And we paid his price, we argued for a chance to pay it, we shoved and insulted each other, sugar-starved and frightened, the children of the soft drink and the ice cream parlor and the beer joint: deprived of sweets and alcohol and certainty, we begged Liebknecht to take our dollars. Where we were going we could not use money, we believed: if the enemy didn't get us the Arabs would, because that was what the Book said.

The Book was horror in paper covers, a catalogue of warnings and threats called "Soldier's Handbook: North Africa." Its purpose was to make Morocco and Algeria into outskirts of hell. Each sentence began, "It is forbidden." It was forbidden to look at an Arab woman, even if she had on a veil, the Book said; it was forbidden to ask Arabs for alcoholic beverages, because their religion forbade such stuff; it was even better not to speak to them at all, the Book said, as they did not like infidels: all they liked was to emasculate people they didn't like, and we began to wonder if the war should not be carried on by the WACs, or the Army Nurses Corps. It was forbidden to eat any fruit or vegetables in North Africa, the Book said, since all crops were fertilized with human offal: still, we could not get very excited over that, since we didn't see how we could live long enough to find any fruit or vegetables. There were scorpions everywhere, and no water supply was safe. The Book was not certain, but probably poisonous snakes abounded in some areas. All this was serious enough, but the book tactfully ignored the worst aspect of Africa: the Afrika Korps. Possibly we had an early edition, but in any case we knew we weren't going to need money.

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Candy bars shot up in price as the convoy neared Gibraltar and the destroyers started chasing submarines. Liebknecht announced he had given his money to the battery commander to keep for him: the sum was now so large, he hinted, that he felt it unsafe to keep it himself. The risk was too great. However, he discounted the statements made in the Book: there was sure to be some little business or other to be carried on in Africa, he said, and his attention wandered when we mentioned the Afrika Korps.

In Oran we saw he was probably right: Arab prostitutes milled in the dock area, unveiled, painted and mascaraed: they shouted, "Hey, soldier, me pink inside like Queen Victoria!" forty years behind the times but unmistakably not forbidden. The Arab men smiled upon us, they filled our canteens with green wine for a dollar, they offered to pay twenty dollars for our empty barracks bags or mattress covers. Liebknecht was frenzied: within two days he had a ring of Arabs working with him in our staging area. The price of wine went up to two dollars, barracks bags dropped to ten, all deals handled through Liebknecht. He was becoming, unmistakably, rich. He even sold us the vegetables we were not supposed to eat, and we bought them as we had bought the candy bars, because the heat was relentless and the water a chemical joke: we devoured small, tasteless melons and began to look at Liebknecht with respect. He had not been wrong so far, we said, and began to feel indignant with ourselves. The war wouldn't last forever, we said, and we spoke of making a little something on the side. One man sold a jeep tire and was courtmartialed; another was strangled in an Arab bordello. But Liebknecht, impregnable Liebknecht, prospered. He was almost a spiritual leader, if we had any spiritual substance, a figurehead, a billboard, the national dream. He spoke of expensive cars and a speedboat, and smoked good cigars. He was going to own a restaurant and bar in New York. He might give some of us jobs in the kitchen, he said. We listened and grinned, taking it all, watching and trying to understand how he did it, bewitched out of our senses. Bewitched, because we had forgotten something,

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something which Liebknecht apparently had never known, had apparently never troubled to notice because it did not fit into his insanely rational system, because it was insanity itself made reasonable and huge: the war. The battalion finished staging and headed east along the coast for the front.

We went in a long, roaring convoy under a pall of dust so thick and penetrating it seemed a solid, dust so old and finely powdered on this hard rind of Africa that it coated us like dried clay, turning men into gray lumps which cracked and split when they moved. And Liebknecht too was dusted, coated and choked, at first swearing and then silent, awed or bored by this incredible, absurd column of dust which blocked out the mountains and the sea, the vineyards and the white cubes of Arab houses. We were a holocaust of dust and thousands of tons of metal, roaring blindly up the road all day, the men in each tank or half-track able to see only the tank or half-track ahead, and everybody wondering and hoping that the colonel was in front and knew what he was doing, where he was going. When we stopped at last and the dust settled we saw the sun was just down beyond the mountains. We went into our first position there, spread around the outskirts of a deserted village of about ten houses. Headquarters and service batteries found places for themselves in the houses; the gun batteries were further away.

Liebknecht, we now learned, was officially a message center runner for headquarters battery: it was odd, but we had never thought before just what his job was. He produced a sagging brass bedstead from a house, set it up in the house where the cooks were, and before chow was ready was selling PX supplies, Arab souvenirs and pieces of German equipment.

We had finished eating and were standing in line at the wash tubs with our messkits when "B" battery started firing, over on the left. It was the first time we had seen the guns going in earnest and everybody ran up on a little knoll to watch. It looked very serious: you looked out into the darkness and then suddenly the six M-7s would be lighted up by their big, orange, muzzle flashes, silhouetting men and jeeps

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for an instant, then the shock of the explosions and faintly, in the echo, you could hear the rustle of the shells going out and away in the night. It was eerie, and we didn't talk much: I had the feeling that we were going pretty far with this thing; we were likely to get somebody mad, doing anything as irresponsible as this. After all, we didn't even know what the country was like, it struck me, and here we were firing 105-millimeter shells out there eight or nine thousand yards into the dark. And on top of that the muzzle flashes were so huge I didn't see how we could help being found out. I had thought a lot about what it would be like, but none of this had occurred to me at all. I was embarrassed by our presumptuousness and our racket, and I had a strong desire to pretend I didn't have anything to do with the whole crowd.

The firing went on for about ten minutes and then stopped. We stayed on the knoll, waiting to see if they'd start again but they didn't. It began to get cold, and we were glad we hadn't thrown away our overcoats. After a while we went down to the village and discovered Liebknecht had found some Arabs and was selling wine. We told him about "B" battery, but he wasn't interested.

"Probably just showing off for some General," he said, and kept filling canteens, at five dollars each. "You guys want to worry about something, find me some of them Kraut rotating bands," he said.

Rotating bands were rings of bright, soft metal which fitted around a shell and were cut by the barrel's grooves when the gun was fired, giving the shell the spin which held it on its course. We had seen souvenir cigarette lighters made from them in Oran, where sailors were paying Arabs ten or fifteen dollars each for the bands, and Liebknecht said he would give us three dollars for any we found. He had a system to get them back to the port, he said. We saw his margin of profit, as usual, but we had no system: we never had one. We lived in a lethal world, armed and armored, but somehow we were unarmed against Liebknecht, who seemed invincible and invulnerable. Still, he was terribly vulnerable, because he did not realize he had changed worlds: if we learned anything,

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we learned that from our Liebknecht.

We lay down that night in our blankets for the first time "in support", as the army calls artillery at the front, but I don't think anybody went to sleep. "B" battery began firing again, a single gun adjusting, then the other guns and then "A" battery and "C" battery began firing too. You could not have expected so much noise. The house where I was quartered shook and dust sifted down from the walls, and through the place where the door had been I watched the low, rocky hills light up suddenly from the flashes, the scrub trees throwing long, quick shadows in the orange flare, the noise incessant, as though a machine had gone out of control and was shaking itself to pieces. And then the guns stopped, the echoes rolling hugely among the hills, the whisper of the last shells fading quickly out and away, and in the house we shifted under our blankets.

"For Christ's *sake*!" somebody said bitterly and righteously, and somebody else said, "Man, I sure hope they know what they're doing."

The silence lasted perhaps ten minutes, then noise began again, and the hills were lighted in brief flashes. But this time the light was more white than orange, and the noise was different. At first I couldn't tell exactly how the sound had changed. I sat up, leaning on one elbow, listening: mixed in with the explosions were shrill whines and whistles, followed instantly by vicious buzzings, as though maddened bumble bees were driving for my ears. I knew without being told, although we had wondered if perhaps we would not *have* to be told: these were shells bursting in the village, not the sounds of our batteries firing.

Instantly I was indignant with our guns: they had *not* known what they were doing, and now look! It was infuriating, and I was going to say so, but everybody started shouting at once and we knew we were frightened for good now, probably forever.

"Them crazy bastards!" somebody yelled in the darkness near me, yelled it in a voice of fear, helplessness and futile rage: there had been a serious error somewhere, and we all

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felt it, and were not to blame. That was what was so maddening: we were being made to pay for somebody else's mistake, never our own, we thought, until we began to think that was the story of our lives.

The shelling stopped, of course: we did not count the bursts or the minutes. We lay for a moment in the silence and the darkness, then leaped up and started for the door. But we heard it coming this time, our ears marvelously tuned in such a short time, the peculiar, never-to-be-mistaken sound of the incoming shell, piercing, shrieking, splitting the air from over the horizon to here, now, this instant and this spot quicker than a breath, and we hit the floor as it burst outside.

The fragments buzzed and clanged off the rocks, and in the same noise we heard a shrill sound, and although it did not sound at all like the movies, we knew it was a man screaming. It did not sound any more like a real man than like a man in the movies, but we really did know what it was: it was a terrified sound so inhuman that only a man could make it.

In a few seconds the screaming stopped. We did not hear any more shells coming; moving softly, cautiously, so we could listen to the air, we moved outside. It was Liebknecht, of course: as we tiptoed fearfully over the harsh, rocky ground we heard him gasping, a wet, thick gasping like a ripsaw cutting green wood, and in the gasping he kept saying, "Don't they know?" Just like that, over and over again: "Don't they know? Don't they know?" We weren't sure what he meant.

He had run out of his house to look for rotating bands from the bursting shells. Since he was the first man killed in the battalion they gave him a posthumous Bronze Star and of course he got the Purple Heart automatically. They put on the Bronze Star citation that he had gone out under fire to check the telephone lines, since that would have been his job if he had ever gotten around to going to work. We had to leave him on the ground next to the house under a shelter-half until the next night when a graves registration service truck could come up for him, and they didn't get there until about four in the morning and by that time some damned Arab or other had sneaked in and stolen his clothes. Army

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clothing was worth quite a lot at that time. The graves registration people put him in a mattress cover Service Battery had used that morning to bring up bread in. It shocked us, I remember, but we found out later that was the standard way to do it: s.o.p., it was called, standard operating procedure. There were a lot of little trick names and initials for things in those days.

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MIMESIS

1. THE PRODUCER

Held in the light a story is subdued.
Arranging words in chunks and men in clusters
Prevents the passions from enslaving reason.

Can truth within that well of light be hid?
Can they be real, the posed and spotlit actors
Tossing poised words, unflustered by emotion?

Real? When behind the scenes a girl is kneeling
Out of my private life; a girl in green
(The colour of lovers) dressed like a page, in prayer.

Blinded by light I cannot see her: feeling
The straining eyes to whom she is unseen,
How can I know that she is really there?

2. THE ACTRESS

O long dead sir, by whose persistent will
King struts clown sulks the slurring Machiavel
Twists our intent: O passionate and deft,
You rule existence yet, for you have left
Men lit by lust, persons thrust on by rage,
—Why have you left me in this dark, off stage?
When they are gazing eager from out there,
When he is grouping phrases with such care,
When you had thought of me (how else could I
Be trembling on the edge of being?) Why
Dress me and make me up, enjoining me
To slip my sex, with my identity,
To wear a page's costume, learn by heart
Unnumbered lines—and then provide no part!

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3. THE AUDIENCE

Out there, out here. We watch a play unroll
The screed of story we cannot control.
King walks in state, fool chatters, villain tries
To blur the moral echoes with his lies.
Locked in our darkness we move through their light,
Permit the play to happen in our sight.
We are possessed. What use is it to be
The plot the passions and the stage? Could we
Invite a girl to dress up as a page
And to partake existence on the stage?
For three hours we are author actor play,
Potent and helpless: it will have its way.

4. THE AUTHOR

Continue king to strut; continue fool
To speak what is set down: all's now by rule.
That bland impassioned villain who composed
His speech despite me: he is now enclosed
In grouped persisting words, that are called me.

I died into this play: do I survive?
That poor girl kneeling in my unlit mind
Beyond the story, since I could not find
My way to let her in—is she alive?
The play is locked, a dead man has the key.

—LAURENCE D. LERNER

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W. S. MERWIN

Flight Home

(In August 1956, the American poet and playwright W. S. Merwin flew home after seven years in Europe. The notes that follow are taken from a journal he kept at the time.)

August 27, 1956, A barber shop in St. John's Wood

They say that after seven years every cell in your body has changed. You are a different person.

I wish I could remember what day it was, in July 1949, that I landed in Genoa. Or the day (one or two days before?) when we first came in sight of the Spanish coast.

Strange, now I am going back, to think that I have been in Europe without a break, ever since I was a minor. Ever since I was twenty-one.

On the chart one does not see the long line of wanting to go back. Beginning in my case before I set out, and rising through delight and hostility and wonder and everything that has been the experience of Europe. The line rising clear off the chart at last and stabbing into the air above it, without footing, but without coming down, for how many years now?

Part of the confusion, once the desire to go back got off the chart, arose from the suspicion that this was simply, at least in part, the first shock of maturity: a realization that home, where you grew up and belonged—belonged with and without your own volition—no longer exists. The desire to return to it, the moment you know it no longer exists. I had been away long enough, and surrounded by Europeans thoroughly enough, to get these mixed up. European friends wondering, as they say, what I will make of it. Probably nothing at all. Wishing, they say, that they could be here, like a fly on the

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wall, to watch, when I get back. How can I explain that I do not want to go back in order to form opinions. That, unless I am very wrong, opinions will have nearly nothing to with the main thing of being back. Home is a place that does not exist, about which your opinions are irrelevant.

Aug. 27, 1956, 11 : 30 p.m., PAA Clipper Carib

It is nearly impossible, afterwards, to remember at what point I began to believe that I was really going. Believing comes elusively, not when you expect, most often, but both earlier and later, only gradually filling in the place where it will be. Unpredictable, like a season changing.

It would come over me all at once that I was, say, sitting in that barber's chair for the last time before I went. It would take the imagination by shock. The next minute I didn't believe it at all. I was sure I'd go on and have the next haircut in that same chair, (with the barber who'd learned what I enjoyed was not having him talk to me, but having him carry on animated conversation with other customers, to which I could listen) and the one after that, and the one after that. When I got around to having haircuts at all. Somewhere else in the mind the imagination suddenly looks down the long vistas of time where one will not walk. The possible lives that one will not lead.

And twenty-four hours before I was due to go, when everything was reminding me that it was happening for the last time—a rhythm that had gathered speed until it was unbroken—I would find myself going through the motions of the place's most familiar habits, and not be able to believe.

I was sure I was going in a thin way like a hum in your ears, yesterday, as the desk gradually grew bare and everything in the study was either packed or put away. Not feeling anything about it but a certain emptiness independent of the emptying room; but sure. Feelings? I suppose they were there, after all, but like beasts patient as immigrants, waiting to move in on the emptiness when their time came.

And sure yesterday as my key-case kept getting lighter, and the keys one by one were used for the last time and then

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packed in intelligent places where I will never be able to find them again, or left with D.

Then with all but a few things done, except things that could wait till the last minute, or things that would take too long anyway and must be abandoned, suddenly finding that everything was ready. And time all at once was heavy. Between the intense activity of getting ready, and the farewells and rush of getting off, time was heavy. More so not because I was anxious to go. I'd forgotten that, days before. A week ago. But because of all reasons I did *not* want to go; above all because I did not want to leave D. Wanted not to be going, but since I was going wanted to be gone. How different from most times when I've been going somewhere, thinking almost entirely of where I was going, savoring the whole trip, from the moment I was ready to go. Different entirely from when I left America, for I didn't know how long, seven years ago. Even though a great part of me wanted to stay in America then, and even had an array of reasons. (Why go to Europe when I knew so little of America?) I imagine part of the difference is this: that, apart from D., I know just how much, and in what ways I'm fond of Europe, but I didn't know what I felt about America. I regretted leaving, before I had even gone, but I didn't know what I'd really miss until I'd been away for some time. Foreign places, however familiar, defining your feeling about home. But stay away too long and you're bound to confuse that with homesickness. (Which I never in my life felt, except in the mildest ways, until these last few years. Unprepared for it.)

The lassitude that descended, in that pause of an hour or so between the end of getting ready, and the time to go. Not calling the taxi, after all, until almost too late. That dazed lassitude that does not believe in time; or, at the moments when it has to countenance the minutes' passing, panics, and protests, protests, flailing in molasses, shouting under water: "Not today, no, not today." But dazed, languorous, just the same. The lassitude hand in hand with the emotions themselves of good-bye. And they, together, swelling the occasion with their heavy, bewildered, helpless dumbness.

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I left D. at the upstairs door and told her not to come to the window. The daze still there (like the feeling when you have been in a pub for several hours at lunch-time, and suddenly find yourself out in the sunshine, alone) in the taxi, all the way to the air-terminal. Feeling bulky and clumsy, as though your ears had just stopped ringing. The traffic so heavy that the taxi barely made it in time; the excitement of almost missing the bus to the airport, rising through the numbness of departure, and I was grateful for it.

Odd that passing sense of panic that wants to put it off till tomorrow, that hangs around and wants to go all right, but not today; trying to jump back into yesterday. A feeling that can, in the end, find nothing to focus on, and no grounds for itself. Maybe just an intensification of the familiar conviction (when going out to the theater, or leaving a hotel room) that you are leaving something vital behind. As of course, you always are.

In the rush at the air-terminal, again almost missing the bus. Never having felt any departure so intensely, nor so contradictorily, I was never before so aware of the way the efficient bustle, the professional voices on loudspeakers, the assembly-line roundingup and processing of passengers, resembles the ward-walking manner of nurses. Admirably impersonal. Cheery. For the benefit of everybody especially, designed to brisk, shame, and cozy you along. I've always found this amusing, a tiny bit irritating (making me want to ask them stupid questions and delay everything, and see just how long everything could be made to wait, just how elastic it could all be) and rather pleasant. And this time I wished it wouldn't all rush through so fast, so that I could have a chance to watch the effects of the helpful manner on the other passengers, especially those who were parting at the air-terminal itself. (My incurable vulgar curiosity.) Partly to get away from too clinging a concern with my own departure and what I was (am) leaving.

But in England, up to the very last, there's always the weather to concern you. The morning had been overcast and rainy, but as the taxi drove away the sun came out. And the

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airport bus was stuffy and hot, turtling through the Kensington and Hammersmith traffic in the sunny muggy London late afternoon. The sort of weather that would have women swanning up and down Knightsbridge, and the London shopkeepers and charwomen groaning. A nice summer day, or a bit of one. One of the Bright Periods whose Second Coming the London papers will mendaciously prophecy for months to come. The few English people in the bus quietly sweltering in their dark inconspicuous tweeds (one splendid man with a white mustache and a dirty gabardine raincoat on over his) and the many Americans peeling off their conspicuous pressed, newly bought-in-England woolens. Two collegiate characters, each just twelve pounds overweight, in white shirts, talking seriously about expansion of some kind, somewhere in Connecticut. A glum, brown-dressed, green-faced thin, young New Yorker next to me, filling his embarcation card with that particular expression of unimpressionable, slightly sour-natured boredom which is peculiarly New York. Two ugly girls from Baltimore talking to a handsome woman from further south, up ahead of me. Several South Americans; Brazilians. A collection of Turks, and one family with Turkish diplomatic passports. A group of American Greeks going back to Greece, with the accent of the mother country, the intonation of my country, driving through England.

England, where nearly all intonations of the language except the few variants of what they call "standard English", tend to be considered comic, or ugly and undesirable if you have to take them seriously. A system which, I can see, is good for acting, but strikes me as deadly in most other ways. About as healthy for writing I should think, as the French deliberate limitation of their literary vocabulary was for French poetry. Socially handy, it seems. This fascinating preoccupation with class distinction, which no longer exists. A preoccupation which, after five years off and on in England, I still find as foreign as sampans, and rather distasteful (while admiring some aspects of this non-existent class system). Continuous effort and argument with myself, not to find this amount of preoccupation with class distinctions more than a

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little vulgar. In a way which, to me, looks sterile. Probably this is a case, among so many, where the illusion that we speak the same language registers against my ability to understand.

When we got to the airport the day had gone dark with clouds; there was a raw wind, and the rain had started again. There must have been several inches of water in some places on the tarmac. Rain sweeping over the wings of the waiting planes. The big planes taxiing around on the wet runway, and the rain and real wind skating across it in gooseflesh streaks like flaws rushing across mica. The slipstreams of the planes tore up long plumes of spray, the water streaking out flat and whipping away like grass does out on the airfield. The engines, idling or warming up, actually bared and dried the tarmac, for a second, just in back of the wings. And when a plane would take off, as one did right in front of us, the water on the tarmac would lie gashed and open for a moment, bared over a bone, and then flow back hesitantly to fill the place and smooth it over, after the plane was airborne, just as it would have over a ship that had sunk. The geniis of controlled violence reminding you that the control is artificial, that they're all one family and never forget each other and that two thirds of the world is violence.

With everything so organized and sterilized and herded and heated and air-conditioned, it seemed strange that one should be walking in real rain, even for a minute. The taxiing around the airport, that always robs me of the last shred of my sense of direction, wherever I am, as though you had to be robbed of that before you could be hurled straight toward your destination as the crow flies. The houses and allotments around the airport turning and turning. You have to be dizzied, after being robbed of volition; be the Blind Man. The voices in the plane coming from far away, as through the sleep of a child, over the noise of the engines; the pressure of everything seeming to build up in the plane. Wanting to sing, as always, when the engines, one by one, were gunned and roared, at the end of the runway before the take-off, and the plane shook itself free of the ground. As excited as a child, as

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always, by the take-off. And at the same time, this time, suddenly caught in an immense depression, as though all the dead weight of the lassitude of an hour, two hours, before, had fallen on me at once, and was carrying me down. Wondering how it had happened that D. was not there. Realizing that she had not been out of my mind since I had left, though the feeling of leaving her had no clear image of her to focus on. And could not conjure one. Could wonder what she was doing, but could not envisage her moving. Only, with an effort, call up the image of her as I left her, and the minutes before. It seemed for a moment as though I was being dragged away from her, fingers weakening, slipping apart. So that as the plane rushed down the runway and the wedge between us and the ground widened, and the line of houses streaked by, I had a distinct impression of a cloth being violently torn. I would have rushed out of the plane that minute, had it been still; or have been tempted to. And back onto it, the moment my feet touched the ground.

England looked soaked, sodden, from the air. Whole fields lying under water. The standing water in sheets of glassy grey, no color, white, no color; showing the contours of all the hollows and low patches. As though a sheet of some sort of metal had been slid through the land. The ponds looking higher than their banks, and the Thames looking as though it lay *on top* of the countryside. Landscape and sky all lights and shades of grey, in every direction. Even the sunlight grey and laden with rain: pregnant. The sky dark with tons and tons of water as we flew toward Wales; and the towns beneath looking as if they had never been dry.

A nun looking like an albino buffalo with dyspepsia had got on at London, with another of her cloth, and I with my superstitions had to keep my fingers crossed all the way to Catholic Shannon because where could I find two dogs on an airplane to cancel the nuns? Though we were flying over towns full of Englishmen all loving dogs as Americans are supposed to love their mothers.

We were in and out of long feathers of black cloud, over Wales; after dusk with the lights on in the towns, but the

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dark not final yet, and the coast of Wales clear and sharp as we flew over.

Next to me a young thin Jewish doctor, my age, from Philadelphia, who has been all over Europe as surgeon to a travelling Negro basketball team.

He has been to see his grandfather's four ancient sisters in Liverpool but I have been able to extract few details from him other than their ages (69, 72, 78, 82), the fact that two of them are almost blind, and that they are too old to cry. This last seems to be quite a drawback, since although they had never seen him before they apparently all wanted to cry as soon as they knew he was there, their brother's son whom they thought they'd never live to see; and it seems they were all of them pretty choked up as long as he was there. But enjoyed it, if he is any indication. Probably quite genuinely glad to see each other...

Cloud over Ireland until we got to the west. And then the low-running hills looking green as in the story-books, in the almost dark dusk. Long pennons of water winding in from the coast, with lights along them, and everything low. We came in over water.

And Shannon was better than I could have hoped. The low, dark green buildings, temporary and whorish. The feeling that they'd sell you their genuine Machree grandmother if you expressed an interest in such baggages and had the green money. People lined up ten deep at the liquor counter, buying the limit. Watches, perfumes, Irish linens and tweeds, pipes, souvenirs of olde Erin impossibly clean and already looking like the belongings of tourists. A long waiting-room with asbestos walls, where fifty travellers sprawled and smoked and drank and sat guard over packages and looked as dejected as though they had just learned they were going to live there. None of them seemed to be speaking to each other. Loud-speakers in the walls asking for Father O'Brien every two minutes, or if not Father O'Brien, Father Malloy. We were led into a dull supper of thumb soup with pretensions to mushrooms and flannel beef.

Taking off from Shannon, we had a search-light beam on

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us, and the light in the propellers made big, slow-widening spirals of light, with spirals of shadow inside them that spread outward from the propeller shafts. Like those tops I had as a child, where the colors melted outward as the top spun.

12 : 35 a.m. London time

I wonder whether it is raining in London. Probably. I wonder whether D. will wring out the rags that I left in the attic joists before she goes to bed, so that the leaking water won't get too heavy in the bedroom ceiling and bring it down with a sodden crash all over the bedroom floor. I wonder whether she will sleep tonight, alone in the bedroom, with, on top of everything else her dislike of sleeping alone in the house.

The dipper is as bright as ever in Spain, just outside the window. A regatta of little triangular clouds, far below, as we fly west. And one great mountainous cloud which we have just flown through had a long promontory which ran out into nothing, and made me feel vertigo for the cloud. I remember seeing a promontory in Majorca, on a day so still that its reflection in the sea was as sharp and clear as its own shape; they made a single shape running out into the colorless sea that looked like a sky, and it seemed they must certainly fall. And that first summer in France, the day when I swam out into the Mediterranean trying out a pair of underwater goggles, which I'd never worn before. Warm with pleasure at the first long view of the jagged sea-floor shifting with light and blue shadows. Fish, fronds, sea-anemones, swimmers, and sliders and weeds washing. The pocked snags and sloping ridges maybe thirty or forty feet below me as I rocked and swayed and swam out. They deepened a little and then rose toward the surface again, a hundred feet out. And then suddenly ended. The sharp edge dropped off into dark blue nothing, in which occasionally a tiny fin would flash light for a second. I was out over nothing at all, and it felt cold, and nowhere but in my dreams had I ever known such vertigo.

I wonder whether N. went over to see D. after I'd gone, as she said she was going to. Whether D. went to supper at N.'s

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as I hope. D. telling me not to think of her as sad, all the time I am away; not to associate her with the idea. I hope it works both ways.

Every time you leave it is the last time.

Even if passionately addicted to talking about myself, how difficult it would have been to explain to friends in England (and to some Americans) this thing of *not expecting anything* from going back. I know things have changed. I know too that, as I've felt it all receding from me, I've made it up, invented it. I knew at the time that I was doing it.

I don't expect to be disappointed at finding that my invention was false, that the place isn't like that at all, that even the things I never liked, and remember disliking, have changed. I expect to be immensely relieved to be able to abandon the fiction entirely, and let the real thing take over. Because the real fiction was a fence to keep people away from what of America I felt I had managed to hang on to. And I was aware that it would end by keeping me away from it too. I look forward to being able to admit to an honest dislike of something right there and my own. A thing that I've hardly allowed myself to do for months, not because I was concerned with anyone's opinions, but because of a fear that such admission might push the smallest detail of home, even an unpleasant one (especially an unpleasant one) further away from me. But remembering, in private as deliberately as anything else, sordor, squalor, waste, ugliness, injustice. One thing I do expect, is to respond to the place simply, with delight, or admiration, or repulsion, as I do in Europe. Not one feeling at a time. But several of them or all of them, all me, at once.

I have loathed that fiction, and myself for fostering it. Like finding oneself insisting that the person one loved was pretty. Finding myself betraying everything, out of my desire not to betray it. Only let me waste no time now even for penance. It redresses nothing, least of all balance. Let me find instead a hard eye, proud of having no mercy, needing none, for the thing it loves.

I don't think that Europeans get the same sort of passion for

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home. Generations and generations having worked out a way of regarding the place, taught them where to fix the feeling, what to see and how to communicate with it. And just the confidence which must come from the awareness that it all has been there so long already. And allow themselves even nostalgia without so much danger of sentimentality running riot. They can do it all more gently, more gracefully. Two qualities that we, quite often, must manage without.

I suppose it would be simpler to say that they have loved their place for generations, centuries; and know it, without having to make a fuss about it. Whereas, by comparison, we begin as a loveless people. Generation after generation having cared little for the place. Our fathers began by caring little enough about Europe so that they could leave it. We've used the place, wasted it. It has made us prodigal, restless. And we are attached to it in still-raw ways that we aren't aware of, most often. We ought to know that we couldn't hate it as fiercely as we do sometimes without there being something honest in our attachment to it. But there is always the sense of surprise, of inarticulate awkwardness, at discovering that the name for what you feel is love.

The black sea down there doesn't even need sleep, all the way to Labrador; and the night is splendid, and above it all.

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GOODBYE MAN

Our ancient lives enhanced their lively wit
We hissed the cave shut with an angry spyt
The hills will stagger down the mountain's rind.

We stared beyond the voyage of the kite
That was before all anguish on this site
The wild leaves vanish in the furious wind.

The dreary men set up the iron spit
This justified the madman's holy writ
The piled brush dryly waits the savage find.

Our declarations are no holy writ
Betoken ego, accident and wit
The wild leaves vanish in the furious wind.

Hard as stone they grill the wayward knight
They burn the brush, cut down the mounting kite
The hills now stagger down the mountain's rind.

—DACHINE RAINER

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

William Blake *(The Day of the Alligator)* is now serving his third sentence in a southern prison. He was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, came to the United States at the age of ten, and worked as a jazz pianist after attending the University of Illinois and Northwestern. In 1951 and 1952, while serving his first prison term for petty larceny and breaking and entering, he wrote a series of letters which were published in THE PARIS REVIEW No. 13.

Hughes Rudd *(The Bankrupt)* worked on a newspaper before his present job with a commercial film company in Kansas. His story entitled *The Fishers* was published in THE PARIS REVIEW No. 15 and his fiction has also appeared in *Harper's* and the *American*.

John Shepley *(Laughing with Grandmother)* went to Harvard and afterwards ran a silk screen business in New York; he sold it and left for Florence where he has been living for the last few years. His story entitled *The Machine* was included in the Martha Foley collection for 1957 and he has completed an unpublished first novel called *The Death of a Revolution*.

INTERVIEWS

Michael Millgate *(Interview with Angus Wilson)* is a young English critic recently returned from America where he published articles in the *Partisan Review*, the *New Republic* and other periodicals. He is now doing research in American literature at the University of Leeds.

Anthony Whittier *(Interview with Frank O'Connor)* published his first short story, *Gulf Pond is a Half Mile Wide*, in THE PARIS REVIEW No. 13. Educated at Tufts College and the Sorbonne, he lives in New York.

CHRONICLE

W. S. Merwin *(Flight Home)* is the author of three books of poetry and a play in verse which was produced in London. After his return to America from England in 1956, he spent a year on a Rockefeller Grant at the Poet's Theater in Cambridge, Mass. and he now lives in Boston. A recent poem, *The Frozen Sea*, appears on page 26 of this issue.

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POETRY

Arthur Boyars *(Initial)* is editor of *Mandrake* and lives in London. His *Poem* appeared in THE PARIS REVIEW No. 4.

John Haislip *(First Frost)* is a teaching fellow at the University of Washington.

Roger Hecht *(The Burden)* studied at Kenyon College. His work has been published in *The Saturday Review*, *Poetry*, and THE PARIS REVIEW.

John Hollander *(By the Sea)*, a former Junior Fellow at Harvard, teaches at Connecticut College for Women. His work has appeared in most of the better-known literary magazines. A poem, *The Fable of the Bears in Winter*, was published in our eleventh issue.

Jascha Kessler *(On Forgetting To Set My Alarm Clock)* works in the school text research division of Harcourt Brace. He won a prize in poetry in the Hopwood Contest at the University of Michigan in 1952. His verse has previously appeared in *Encounter* and *Accent*.

Laurence D. Lerner *(Mimesis)* is an English poet and critic who lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His work has been published in numerous British journals.

Paul Petrie *(After the Funeral)* studies under Paul Engle in the Writer's Workshop at Iowa.

Dachine Rainer *(Goodbye Man)* lives in Bearsville, New York and writes fiction as well as poetry. W. H. Auden represented her work in his *Faber Book of Modern American Verse*.

John Wain *(The New Sun)* is one of England's leading younger poets and critics. He is the author of two novels, two books of verse, a volume of critical essays, and the editor of other works.

NOTE: The editors gratefully make acknowledgement to the following for the portfolio of engravings by Mario Avati: Edition Javal, publisher of *A l'aube d'une guerre*, by Philippe de Rothschild; Edition Société de Bibliophiles, "Les Impenitents", publishers of *Chimera*, tales by Lewis Carroll; Edition Société de Bibliophiles "Le Cercle Grolier", publishers of *Contes Cruels*, tales by Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

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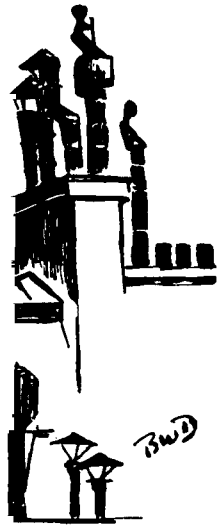

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Roger Barr, M. F. A., former professor, University of California and The California School of Fine Arts, gives personal instruction at the American Students' and Artists' Center, 261 Blvd. Raspail, (Metro Raspail), ODEon 99–92.

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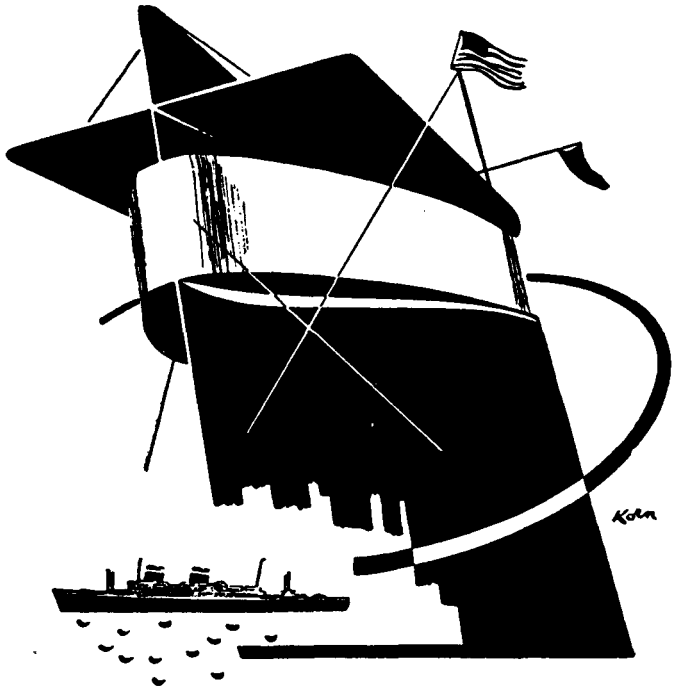

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